

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

The price of freedom: the opportunities and constraints of freelance employment for older workers : a study of media professionals

Thesis

How to cite:

Platman, Kerry (2002). The price of freedom: the opportunities and constraints of freelance employment for older workers : a study of media professionals. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2002 The Author

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00004dc2>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

KERRY PLATMAN
B.A., M.Sc.

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

**The Opportunities and Constraints of Freelance
Employment for Older Workers**

A Study of Media Professionals

PhD

Management

Date of submission: December 11, 2001

AUTHOR NO R7651198

DATE OF SUBMISSION. 10 DECEMBER 2001

DATE OF AWARD. 18 FEBRUARY 2002

ABSTRACT

The UK's population is ageing at a time when its oldest workers are leaving the labour market at progressively younger ages. This paradox – of declining economic activity rates among the 50 plus age group and rising longevity – has led to widespread concern over the social and economic consequences.

Meanwhile, flexible work has grown in the UK economy and has been promoted as a promising solution to 'the problem' of older workers. Portfolio-type work in particular has been presented as a liberating option for the over 50s. Working for a range of clients, so the argument goes, would allow older workers to bypass barriers to employment in later life (such as company-specific early exit programmes), and would also allow them to negotiate their own transition into retirement. Yet there is a lack of research that examines the realities of portfolio working and its sustainability for people wishing or needing to remain economically active in later life.

This study of freelancing among older workers was located in a sector where portfolio-type work was well-established: the media industry. It relied on in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 51 people who were actively engaged in freelance work as employers, individual freelancers and industry experts. The aim was to understand the conflicts, barriers and opportunities to freelance employment for those aged 50 years and over, using two contrasting perspectives, one provided by Nikolas Rose in his 'powers of freedom' thesis and the other by Margaret Archer in her 'morphogenetic' approach to realist social theory.

The study found that freelancing did extend working lives and permit a degree of freedom and control in later life. However, it was a form of employment which was insecure, volatile and largely unregulated. The oldest freelancers were vulnerable to diminishing rewards, dwindling networks, dated skills and ageist attitudes. Age was found to be an important mediating factor in the experience of risk in the freelance labour market.

CONTENTS PAGE

	Page
Acknowledgements	i-ii
 Chapter 1 The Introduction	 1
1.1. Research aims	3
1.2. Methodology	4
1.3. Defining older workers	5
1.4. Outline of chapters	6
 Chapter 2 The Literature on Flexible Employment and Older Workers	 10
2.1. Introduction	10
2.2. Demographic change	11
2.3. Early exit	12
2.4. Policy solutions	12
2.4.1. Flexible employment for older workers: Government policy	13
2.4.2. Flexible employment for older workers: a campaigning issue	15
2.4.3. Flexible employment for older workers: the portfolio-type career	15
2.5. Changes in corporate life	18
2.6. Age discrimination in employment	20
2.7. Changes to employment, the workplace & the retirement experience	23
2.7.1. Transitions from work to retirement	24
2.7.2. The re-formulation of the employment 'contract'	25
2.7.3. Risk and insecurity in the workplace	27
2.8. <i>The incidence and nature of flexible employment in the UK</i>	29
2.8.1. Statistical analyses of data sources	29
2.8.1.1. Part-time work	32
2.8.1.2. Temporary and seasonal working	32
2.8.1.3. Self-employment	33
2.8.2. Vocational literature: the 'how to freelance' guides	35
2.8.3. The experiences of portfolio-type work	40
2.9. Summary	42
 Chapter 3 The Research Philosophy	 44
3.1. Introduction	44
3.2. Three contrasting world views	46
3.3. Social realism: an extraction of key themes	47
3.3.1. Agency & social structures as separate but inter-dependent	48
3.3.2. The relationship between agency and social structure	49
3.3.3. <i>The stratified nature of social reality</i>	51
3.4. Realism as a 'critical' endeavour	52
3.5. Overview	53
3.6. The pursuit of knowledge	55
3.7. Implications	56
 Chapter 4 The Research Methods	 58
4.1. Introduction	58
4.2. The researcher's voice	61
4.2.1. My professional background & interests	61
4.3. The media industry as a case study	62
4.4. Adapting case study methodology	65
4.5. Interviews	66
4.5.1. Interview boundaries	67

	Page
4.5.2. Interviews as re-constructions	69
4.6. Anonymity for interviewees	70
4.7. The strategy for selecting the individual cases	71
4.8. Locating the study group	75
4.9. The research instruments	79
4.9.1. MiniDisc technology	82
4.9.2. Electronic mail	83
4.9.3. Informant databases	83
4.10. Data generation	84
4.11. Data analysis	85
4.11.1. Multiple perspectives	88
4.11.2. Constant comparison	88
4.11.3. Circularity in the research process	89
4.11.4. Coding	92
4.11.5. Theoretical sampling & saturation	93
4.12. Computer-assisted data analysis	94
4.12.1. The conceptual design of Atlas.ti	96
4.12.2. The coding system	96
4.12.3. Devices for managing the data	97
4.12.3.1. Document families	97
4.12.3.2. Code families	98
4.12.4. Tools for conclusion drawing	98
4.13. Problems with the methodology	103
4.13.1. Gaining clarity	103
4.13.2. Lay concepts	103
4.13.3. Proximity to data	104
4.13.4. Validating findings	105
4.14. Reflexivity in the research process	106
 Chapter 5	 108
Freelance Employment Practices in the Media Industry	108
5.1. Introduction	108
5.2. Media industry overview	109
5.2.1. The value of the media industry	110
5.2.2. The fluidity of the media industry	111
5.2.3. Casualisation	112
5.3. Definitions of freelance employment	116
5.4. The attractions of freelance labour for employers	118
5.4.1. Flexibility	118
5.4.2. Affordability	120
5.4.3. Instant knowledge	120
5.5. The potential risks of freelance labour	123
5.5.1. Pressures of time	123
5.5.2. Financial pressures	124
5.5.3. Creative pressures	125
5.6. Freelance networks	127
5.6.1. The informal network	127
5.6.2. Supplementing the informal network	131
5.6.2.1. Responses to speculative approaches	132
5.6.2.2. Data bases of freelancers	132
5.6.2.3. Specialist single operator agents	133
5.6.2.4. Published data sources	133
5.6.2.5. Freelance-friendly employment policies	133
5.6.3. Formal recruitment	134
5.7. Freelance pay	134
5.8. The supply of freelance labour	137
5.9. The value of age and experience	139
5.10. Summary	144

	Page
Chapter 6 The Freelancer's Perspective	146
6.1. Introduction	146
6.2. Freelance diversity	147
6.3. The attractions of freelancing	150
6.3.1. Motives for freelancing	150
6.3.2. The future appeal of freelancing	155
6.3.2.1. Finances	155
6.3.2.2. Satisfaction	155
6.4. Sustaining the freelance relationship	160
6.4.1. Customer focus	161
6.4.1.1. Project delivery	161
6.4.1.2. Feedback from clients	164
6.4.1.3. Negotiating fees and conditions	167
6.4.2. Market focus	172
6.5. Navigating the insecurities of freelancing	180
6.5.1. The finite nature of freelance employment	180
6.5.1.1. Organisational factors leading to termination	181
6.5.1.2. Individual factors	182
6.5.2. Conflict in the employment relationship	185
6.5.3. Sources of formal and informal support	192
6.5.4. The limits to protection	193
6.6. Freelancing in later life	198
6.6.1. Maintaining and replenishing networks	201
6.6.2. Satisfying clients' needs	205
6.6.3. Earning an adequate income	210
6.6.4. Cultivating productive and harmonious relations	214
6.7. Summary	216
 Chapter 7 Discussion	 217
7.1. Introduction	217
7.2. The ethics of freedom	217
7.3. Freelancing and the freedoms of older workers	218
7.4. Freelancing and the freedoms of employers	221
7.5. The uncertainties of freelance employment	222
7.5.1. Informal networks	223
7.5.2. The limited nature of project work	224
7.5.3. Contemporary skills	224
7.5.4. Rates of pay	225
7.5.5. Lack of formal support and protection	226
7.6. Freedom as an illusion?	227
7.7. Freelancing and the power of critical realism	229
7.8. Summary	230
 Chapter 8 Conclusions	 231
8.1. Research aims	231
8.2. Research limitations	232
8.3. Support for 'the portfolio thesis'	232
8.4. Contradictions in 'the portfolio thesis'	233
8.5. The strategic management of freelancers	234
8.6. The tenuous employment contract	236
8.7. Issues for further research	237

	Page
Appendices	
Appendix 01	Specialist 'how to freelance' books
Appendix 02	Research prospectus
Appendix 03	Interview schedules
	Freelance workers
	Key informants
	Employers
Appendix 04	Employer and key informant job titles
Appendix 05	Profile of freelance interviewees
	05.1. Age & gender spread
	05.2. Dependants
	05.3. Freelance work histories
	05.4. Professional job titles
	05.5. Media sub-sectors
	05.6. Contractual variations
	05.7. Income
	05.8. Variations over time
Appendix 06	Key to excerpts from interview transcripts
Tables	
Table 2.1. Self-employment rates by age: UK 1997	33
Table 5.1. UK employment by media sector in 1998 and 2001	110
Table 5.2 Age profile of the freelance workforce	115
Table 6.1. Freelance interviewees by age and gender	148
Table 6.2. Freelance interviewees by years freelancing and gender	148
Table 6.3. The draw of freelancing for workers	152
Table 04.1. Job titles for employer & key informant interviewees, by media sub-sector	250
Table 05.1. Freelance interviewees by age, gender & media sub-sector	251
Table 05.2. Freelance interviewees with dependants, by age & gender	252
Table 05.3. Freelance interviewees by years freelancing, gender & media sector	253
Table 05.4. Freelance job titles among freelance interviewees	254
Figures	
Figure 4.1. Location of first interviews with research participants	68
Figure 4.2. Contact network mapping chart	78
Figure 4.3. Interviews with study group members by month	81
Figure 4.4. Linear & circular models of process and theory	90
Figure 4.5. Extracting patterns and themes from the interview data	91
Figure 5.1. The appeal of freelance labour for employers	122
Charts	
Chart 05.1. Spread of ages and years freelancing among freelance interviewees	258

	Page
Boxes	
Box 6.1. The case study of a freelance photographer	153
Box 6.2. The case study of a freelance producer-director	204
Box 6.3. The case study of a freelance photographer: revisited	209
 References	 262

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to the freelancers, employers and media industry experts who gave so generously of their time to take part in this research. Their experiences, views, suggestions and contacts guided me through a complex and challenging research undertaking. In particular, I must thank those who stayed in touch, offered encouragement along the way and shared their own challenging lives with mine.

I must commend the *Open University Business School* for acting as an exemplary home for my doctoral studies. The School provided me with a financially-secure, well-resourced and creative environment in which to pursue this research. More individuals than I can possibly name here helped me master the computer software, the library catalogues and the multiple office moves.

I am indebted to my supervisors for their initial faith in the project and for their patience whilst I explored and agonised. To Phil Taylor, I thank him for maintaining his enthusiasm and encouragement throughout. To John Storey, I owe an immense gratitude for his clarity and superb critical eye, always deployed when it mattered most. To Derek Pugh, his timely advice and attention to detail was much appreciated.

To my peers, their support during these isolated years made a difference. The companionship and good sense of David Wield, Stephen Potter and my group of doctoral workshop colleagues were invaluable. In addition, the bus stop and canteen chats, and the many workshops and seminars, brought enjoyment to the whole endeavour. Particular thanks are due to Mike Aiken, whose cycling exploits and research support enriched my studentship years.

Among fellow social gerontologists, Judith Phillips and Anthea Tinker provided an essential steer in the early stages. I must also acknowledge the Age Concern Institute of Gerontology at King's College London for providing the catalyst for my academic endeavours. Also, to Stephen Katz, who suggested the perfect book at just the right time and whose email exchanges helped to clarify a most productive analytical line.

To the staff at the British Library, I offer thanks for their courtesy and efficiency, especially those who worked in the starkly beautiful Humanities 2 reading room. This was my refuge.

To Tom and Jonathan, who counted the days, weeks, months and years, I thank them for also keeping a tally of the number of thesis words. It was a salutary reminder on occasions, and a reason for celebration at others. To grandmothers Helena Rosenberg and Moira Bradshaw, who looked on with puzzlement whilst providing loving and indulgent care for the children on many occasions. Finally, to David Bradshaw, without whose support this thesis would never have been undertaken or completed, I thank him for his selflessness, and for seeing the wood as well as the trees from start to finish.

To all these participants, and many others who must remain nameless, I owe a great debt.

CHAPTER 1

THE INTRODUCTION

Older people have been leaving the labour market at earlier ages than previously in the UK and other industrialised countries. Meanwhile, life expectancy has risen. This paradox - of declining economic activity at a time of population ageing - has led to international concern over the economic and social consequences. Governments have been warned of the increasing financial burdens they face from lost tax revenue and extra welfare and pension spending.

Older workers, then, pose something of a dilemma for those in political power. Compulsory employment for people in their 50s and over is seen as neither desirable nor enforceable by democracies. Countries such as the UK have resisted the introduction of employment legislation which would outlaw age discriminatory early exit policies. Instead, recent UK Governments have preferred a 'light touch' approach - encouraging, persuading, educating and in some cases supporting¹ companies and individuals to recognise the value of, and opportunities available to, experienced labour.

But voluntary codes and welfare to work schemes have done little to arrest the early-exit trends, especially among men aged 50 plus, and it is widely suggested that older workers remain 'a problem'. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the rise in flexible employment in the UK is seen as something of 'a solution'. From the early 1990s, three reports published by separate Government departments cited flexible jobs - such as part-time and temporary working, short-term contracts and consultancy - as potentially important for older people (Employment Department Group, 1994, Cabinet Office, 2000, Foresight Ageing Population Panel, 2000). The notion of workplace flexibility, in the context of an ageing labour force, appeared to serve multiple interests. Firstly, it could address the difficulties experienced by older people wanting or needing to remain in paid work, by offering a phased transition into retirement or a re-entry point after a period of unemployment. Secondly, it could ease skills shortages for employers and allow them to keep hold of experienced

¹ New Deal 50plus was introduced by the Labour Government in April 2000 as part of its Welfare to Work strategy. Unemployed older workers were offered advice, training and work placements under a subsidised partnership scheme with employers, local authorities, training providers and others.

workers. Thirdly, it could extend working careers, reduce intolerable welfare burdens and prevent the need for 'heavy touch' Government intervention.

One type of flexible employment regarded as particularly attractive for older workers was the portfolio career. Here was a fluid and empowering form of self-employment which, as depicted by its chief advocate Charles Handy, satisfied the needs of employers whilst, simultaneously, fulfilling individuals' needs for choice and control in later life (Handy, 1991, Handy, 1995). Free from the constraints of formal employment regulation on the one hand and official retirement policies on the other, the organisation and the individual were free to negotiate between themselves the most appropriate and satisfying working arrangements. Older workers could escape an organisational 'master' by working for a range of clients in varying capacities over differing periods of time.

Despite scepticism over the rhetoric of workplace flexibility (Pollert, 1991, Legge, 1998) and of portfolio-type careers (Pahl, 1988, pp.750-1; Herriot et al., 1998, p. 51), reference to Handy's ideas began to appear in a number of policy and research publications about 'the problem' of older workers. Authors were cautious, of course, about suggesting this as a complete solution. Nevertheless, it persisted as a favoured career option for consideration in later life. For Government, in particular, there was an immense advantage in devolving responsibility down to the level of the individual worker and their employer. The role of governing could be transferred to the self-determining and self-designing entrepreneur.

Surprisingly, there has been little in the way of research about the feasibility of such flexible forms, or its implications, for older workers. The flexible employment literature has tended to neglect the position of workers who are nearing or beyond retirement age. Meanwhile, the retirement literature has rarely adopted measures sufficiently sensitive to examine the many types of workplace flexibility which may be relevant to older workers. Yet, without authoritative research inquiries, policy-makers and academics could be recommending - or at least perpetuating ideas about - spurious solutions to the growing difficulties experienced by older people in the labour market.

A study of portfolio-type work in later life would also inform three related debates about, firstly, retirement transitions, secondly, restructured relations between employers and older workers, and, thirdly, age-mediated experiences of workplace risk. Endemic organisational change, technological

advances and global competition are said to have affected the long-term agreements on workplace trust, loyalty and commitment between employers and workers. In their place have come more expedient, short-term 'psychological contracts', in which the most experienced and longest-serving are often seen as largely expendable. In addition, age discriminatory working practices, especially in recruitment and early exit, have left older individuals vulnerable to lengthy periods of unemployment.

Older people are said to have been propelled into a new, unpredictable phase between the end of paid work and the beginning of retirement. The demise of the 'Fordist life cycle' - where work was once guaranteed against unemployment and old age - had resulted in fragmented and uncertain work endings, where older workers were left to fend for themselves in an increasingly volatile labour market. Meanwhile, authors such as Rose (1999) and Beck (1992, 2000) have entered a broader debate on the 'new', endemically insecure workplace (Rose, 1999, Beck, 1992, Beck, 2000). The full-time, permanent job is being fast replaced by risk-fraught self-employment and under-employment. In particular, the work of Nikolas Rose has focused on the defining nature of freedom in our everyday lives, leading to a radical change in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. This has profound consequences for our working lives, as is explored in detail in Chapter 7.

1.1. Research aims

An examination of portfolio-type work would examine critically the images and portrayals of portfolio-type work in later life, as well as the experiences and views of those engaged in its pursuit. In particular, the study seeks an understanding of the following:

- *The incentives and attractions of portfolio-type work for older individuals.* Might individuals regard it as a way to bypass age barriers in the workplace, such as discriminatory practices in recruitment and early exit? Might it permit them to remain in fulfilling paid work beyond the 'normal' age of retirement?
- *The way individuals sustain their portfolio careers, especially in the phase of working life before statutory retirement.* What are the coping strategies and barriers to survival?

- *The components of a successful portfolio relationship.* How is conflict handled between portfolio workers and their employers? How are fees, deadlines and assignments negotiated? What part do informal networks place in the relationship? How are productive and harmonious relations established? Is age and experience relevant? Is gender an important factor?
- *The social, professional and organisational support systems which help portfolio workers manage their working lives.* How reliant are individuals on trade unions, recruitment agencies, or job search sites on the Web?
- *The benefits and pitfalls of portfolio-type employment for employers.* How are such workers recruited, managed and evaluated? How are loyalty, creativity and trust cultivated in workers who are based outside the organisation? What kind of reciprocal agreements are in place between employers and those older portfolio-type workers serving multiple employers, either at the same time or in quick succession?
- *The human resource systems in place to attract, retain and foster the best available flexible talent.* Are there examples of best practice?

A central concern is to examine the extent of autonomy, choice and control in the lives of older portfolio workers. What are the processes and practices that apply to portfolio-type employment, and how might these be relevant to older workers?

1.2. Methodology

The research was designed to give portfolio-type work its best shot. By this I mean that I set out to find examples of success among older portfolio workers and this is reflected in my choice of industrial sector and the selection of the research informants. This is not to say that the less successful were excluded. In fact, a small number of informants were struggling with, and considering leaving, their portfolio lifestyle. Nevertheless, in two main ways, the methodology was biased towards advantageous outcomes.

Firstly, the research group consisted of individual workers offering professional products and services. They were highly educated and involved chiefly in knowledge, information and creative project work – the kinds of employment said to be crucial to a productive and vibrant economy, now and in the future.

Secondly, the research was located in the media industry, a sector where portfolio-type employment had become increasingly common, albeit under a different name, that of freelancing. Although there were some distinctions between the portfolio and the freelance career - in that Handy also included unpaid voluntary work in his portfolio model - they share many common features and understandings. Both presume a succession of assignments for a range of clients, with jobs being limited to specified periods of time. Both regard individuals as self-employed and operating alone (i.e. without employees). Finally, both are relatively mobile and autonomous employment forms where individuals can choose and assemble their own mix of clients and projects. For this reason, freelancing and portfolio-type working will be used interchangeably throughout the text.

1.3. Defining older workers

Arriving at a satisfactory definition of older workers is problematic. There are two distinct advantages to using chronological age, such as 50 years and over, as a marker. Firstly, it allows for comparisons with the many other studies which have used 50 years as the starting point for a definition of older workers. This is especially helpful for citing statistical analyses of labour force and household panel surveys, which use 50 years as a standard threshold for older working groups. Secondly, 50 years has been widely used as a marker for early retirement packages and occupational pensions by employers and pension fund managers. As such, 50 plus has become a socially-constructed threshold which has affected the experience of employment in later life.

However, such a chronological cut-off is limiting. It presumes that only those aged 50 and over have been affected by age stratified employment policies. Clearly, this is not the case. As studies of age discrimination have demonstrated, the point at which workers are regarded as old varies widely, and can start as young as 35 years (e.g. Gallup, 1990). Ageing can also be measured using descriptions, biography and mental or physical criteria (see, for instance, Vincent, 1995, pp. 74-80,

Bytheway, 1997, pp. 8-15, Morgan and Kunkel, 1998). In relation specifically to older workers, Sterns and Miklos (1995) noted five different ways in which older workers had been defined in the literature (Sterns and Miklos, 1995). These were:

- Chronological/legal – age cut-offs, such as the age threshold for cases alleging age discrimination in employment;
- Functional – including measures of health status, physical capacity and cognitive performance;
- Psychosocial – covering age stereotyping and the dating of skills;
- Organisational – meaning career and retirement expectations bound up in specific work cultures; and
- Life-span – involving individual differences over working lives.

Whilst relying on a chronological measure of 'older', this study acknowledges the other dimensions listed above. Ageing is a universal process that starts at birth and continues until death. But it is also a highly individualistic one. Employment chances are likely to be affected not only by age but also by gender, ethnicity, education, financial reserves, geographical location, personality, family circumstances and work histories, as well as by functional performance, mental aptitude and health status. The 50-plus age group is a heterogeneous series of cohorts², each experiencing the (flexible) labour market in different ways. Thus, we would expect the experiences of those freelancers interviewed for this current research to be substantially different from freelancers who were operating 25 years ago, or freelancers who will be operating in the future. Their qualifications may vary, the technology may be radically different and the opportunities available may have grown, contracted or changed in nature.

1.4. Outline of chapters

In the seven chapters which follow, I hope to unravel and scrutinise the multiple interpretations and experiences of freelance employment in later life. **Chapter 2, the Literature on Flexible Employment and Older Workers**, examines a multidisciplinary literature on demographic change, patterns of employment among older workers, changes to corporate careers and age discrimination

² See Vincent for a discussion of the distinction between cohorts, generations, age strata, life cycles and life courses (Vincent, 1995, pp. 6-9).

in employment. Publications are cited to show that workplace flexibility for older people has become a political, policy and campaigning issue. According to Charles Handy and other management writers, older people with the right skills and attitudes are seen as well-positioned to take on such roles. Portfolio-type careers could provide them with satisfying alternatives to full-time jobs. The second half of the chapter discusses transitions in the retirement process and changes to the organisational and employment context. Finally, it examines a range of statistical, vocational and qualitative sources on flexible employment.

In **Chapter 3, the Research Philosophy**, I explain the philosophical principles underlying this study. I describe the influence of Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer in formulating the brand of realism adopted by this research. According to the critical realist philosophy, human beings and social structures are separate and autonomous entities, yet are also transformed by, and are transforming of, each other. Critical realists stress the ability of individuals to be reflective, purposive and innovative in shaping their lives. But they also highlight the structural limitations to these endeavours. This offered a promising framework for a study which examines the power of individuals to control their employment prospects in the years before and after statutory retirement age. Finally, the chapter examines the realist's epistemology, which underpins the study's methodology.

Chapter 4, the Research Methods, gives an account of the research process, beginning with the influence of my own professional background on the research. Based on qualitative design principles, this study relied on in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 51 individuals, including 14 freelancers aged 50 years plus. The chapter explains the reasons for locating the research in the media industry and for using 'snowballing' to locate the study group. A number of research instruments were critical to the collection and analysis of data, namely a digital recording system, a computer-assisted qualitative analysis software package and a database programme. Broadly, the research adopted a self-critical, reflexive approach to the design and a 'grounded' methodology in analysing the data. This methodology was problematic in four respects and these are discussed in the final part of the chapter.

In **Chapter 5, Freelance Employment Practices in the Media Industry**, I describe the key characteristics of freelance employment in the sector. This is based, firstly, on existing research

about trends and working conditions in the media industry and, secondly, on the views and experiences of media employers and key informants interviewed for this present study. The media industry was expanding and freelance opportunities well-established. This suggested that older workers might find a ready market for their skills and expertise. However, the prevailing freelance culture - involving informal networks, capped rates of pay, a climate of intense competition and the availability of younger, usually cheaper, talent - devalued their position.

Chapter 6, the Freelancer's Perspective, is divided into five main parts, beginning with a brief profile of the freelance interviewees who were involved in the research. (Further details are to be found in Appendix 05.) This is followed by a section on the attractions of a freelance career, especially for older workers. The third section focuses on how individuals managed to sustain their freelance careers over time, by examining customer and market responsiveness and the way freelancers negotiated deadlines and fees. The fourth section examines the insecurities of freelancing, especially the finite nature of project work and the difficulties in strategic career planning. Finally, I look at the attractions and disincentives of freelancing in later life.

Chapter 7, the Discussion, draws together the many strands of the research - literary, statistical and interview-based - by using an analytical lens supplied by Nikolas Rose. In his work on 'the powers of freedom', Rose is concerned with choice, liberty and autonomy. This is applied in this chapter to the notional and actual process of freelance employment. Within this perspective, freelancing becomes a relentless and exhausting pursuit involving perpetual (re)negotiation. However, Rose's analytical framework downplays the influence of sources of social inequality in the labour market, such as age. A critical realist perspective helps to deepen our understanding of barriers to freelancing in later life by highlighting the stratified nature of employment risk.

Chapter 8, the Conclusions, examines the implications of current freelance employment practices for older workers. This study of freelancing in the media industry found some support for the 'portfolio thesis', namely that such flexible work did extend working lives and permit a degree of freedom and control in later life. However, the lack of formal, enforceable, industry-wide standards specifying freelance working conditions meant that freelancers were largely unprotected. In addition, there seemed to be a general lack of strategic management practices among media employers towards their freelance workers. This led to unstable and distant 'psychological

contracts' between employers and their freelancers. Importantly, this resulted in the devaluation of the knowledge and experience held by the oldest members of the labour force and undermined their continued participation in the labour market.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE ON FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT AND

OLDER WORKERS

2.1. Introduction

Flexible jobs have been seen as promising options for older people needing or wishing to remain in paid work. Given the dwindling number of secure, full-time jobs lasting until statutory retirement age in the UK, coupled with population and workforce ageing, such alternative forms of work have been promoted as attractive in a variety of quarters. Portfolio-type jobs in particular appear to offer choice, opportunity and control for individuals in the final stages of their working lives. For employers, such jobs mean lower overheads whilst allowing them to retain valuable skills and 'corporate memory'. For central Government, continued employment for older people increases tax revenue and lowers welfare and pension spending. It reduces the need for intervention at a policy and legislative level.

The first half of this chapter examines in detail the apparent attractions of flexibility. It does so by citing a multidisciplinary literature on demography, social policy, gerontology, human resource management, careers and employment. Patterns of population and workforce ageing, and the early exit of older workers from the labour market, do much to explain the frequency with which flexibility has been promoted as a policy response for older workers. Government committees, campaigning groups and management authors have warmly embraced the possibilities of self-employment, contract work, freelancing, consultancy, part-time work, and so on, for individuals needing or wanting to work beyond a full-time career and a fixed retirement date.

Yet there has been very little research which tests the viability of such employment in later life. The next part of this chapter examines three relevant debates on workplace change. Each, in differing ways, helps to inform this present research, yet leaves unanswered many questions over the suitability of portfolio-type work for older workers. The first debate, located largely in the gerontology literature, centres on transitions from work to retirement. The second is concerned with the re-formulation of the employment 'contract' between organisations and their workers, and has

been conducted mainly in human resource management and organisational psychology circles. The third debate focuses on risk and insecurity in the workplace (as well as in society at large) and has concerned a multidisciplinary group of writers and researchers.

The final part of the chapter examines an empirically-based collection of publications, covering statistical trends in flexible employment, particularly among older workers; a vocational literature of self-help guides to freelancing; and, finally, qualitative research on the experiences of portfolio-type careers. However, these studies provide only a partial picture of the incidence, attractions and pitfalls of portfolio-type work for older people.

2.2. Demographic change

The UK's population is ageing. Both the numbers and the proportions of people aged 50 and over have risen substantially over the last 100 years (Office for National Statistics, 1999). In 1997, there were 18.8 million people aged 50 plus, more than three times the number than for 1901. Meanwhile, proportions have doubled: almost one in seven of the total population in 1901 was aged 50 and over, compared to one in three by 1997.

Over the next 20 years, there will be a further, and marked, growth in the numbers and proportions of people aged 50 plus, due to the ageing of the 'Baby Boom' generation born in the 1960s and the decline in fertility and mortality rates. The UK population aged 50 and over is projected to rise from 19.6 million people in 2001 to 25.1 million in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 1999, Table 1.1, p. 10). More importantly, the population of working age (currently defined as 16 to 65 years for men, 16 to 59 for women) will become much older (Office for National Statistics, 1999, Table 1.1, p. 10, Shaw, 2000, p. 8). Population projections by the Office for National Statistics anticipate little change among the under 30s age group, and a fall among those aged 30 to 44 years. But among people aged 45 to 59, numbers are expected to rise significantly - by nearly one quarter, from 10.8 million in 1998 to 13.3 million in 2021 (Shaw, 2000).

2.3. Early exit

Set against these demographic trends are pronounced shifts in patterns of employment among the 50 plus age group. A number of studies have documented the increasing exodus of older people from the workforce at progressively younger ages in the UK (Laczko and Phillipson, 1991, Bone et al., 1992, Trinder et al., 1992, Campbell, 1999, Taylor and Urwin, 1999) and in other industrialised countries (Jacobs et al., 1991, OECD, 1995b, Walker and Maltby, 1997).

Average retirement ages have fallen in the UK by nearly five years for men, from 67.2 years in 1950 to 62.7 years in 1995; and by four years for women, from 63.9 to 59.7 over the same period (Auer and Fortuny, 1999, Tables 7 and 8, pp. 10-11). Campbell's secondary analysis of the Labour Force Surveys between 1979 and 1997 found that economic inactivity rates (covering people of working age who are neither officially employed nor registered as unemployed) for UK men aged 55 to 65 had more than doubled during this time, from nearly 17% to 37% (Campbell, 1999, Table 1, p. 2).

The picture for women is more complex. Although labour force participation rates for older women have risen slightly in the UK over the last decade (Office for National Statistics, 1999, Chart 2.2, p. 26), they still remain much lower than for older men and for younger women. It is possible that later cohorts of older women will have higher employment rates as their higher participation is sustained over time. However, the secondary analysis of labour market and household surveys in the UK casts doubt on this: there is evidence that a distinctive feature of each successive wave of women is a pronounced decline in their employment in their fifties (Ginn and Arber, 1995, Ginn and Arber, 1996, Bower, 2001, Figure 5, p. 110).

2.4. Policy solutions

The paradox of declining economic activity among the 50 plus age group, at a time of an ageing population and workforce, has led to concern at national, European and OECD levels over the social and economic consequences. Current patterns of early exit - entailing loss of tax revenue, increased welfare spending and pressure on pension systems - are seen as endangering the future sustainability of pensions and state welfare provision (OECD, 1998, Disney, 1998, Auer

and Fortuny, 1999). Policy-makers have urged Governments to actively encourage people to work longer (Auer and Fortuny, 1999).

"The implications of ageing for OECD societies are deep and pervasive. The effects have been positive in recent decades. However ageing trends are likely to result in a smaller proportion of the population being in employment in the years after 2010. That poses major challenges..."

"Responding to these challenges requires action on many fronts. Spending on public pensions, health and long-term care must be contained. The structure of retirement income must be reformed and incentives to early retirement eliminated. There must be more support for people, as they grow older, to play a productive life in the labour market and society."

(OECD, 1998, p. 4)

Although the UK's public pension system appears relatively sound compared to other OECD countries like Italy and France (Disney, 1998, Tables 1 & 2, pp. 33-35), there is still a growing consensus among policy experts that working lives should be extended. This was one reason for equalising pension ages at 65 for men and women in the UK from 2010 onwards.

Drucker views what he calls "the collapsing birthrate" as the most spectacular, unexpected and unprecedented development to face westernised countries (Drucker, 1999). His suggested solution: a retirement age of 79 years, the equivalent age in life and health expectancy terms to the age of 65 in 1936, when the United States adopted a national retirement plan.

2.4.1. Flexible employment for older workers: Government policy

Against this backdrop, the flexible employment of older workers appears an attractive solution. As flexible jobs have risen in the UK economy as a whole (Watson, 1994a, Beatson, 1995, Atkinson et al., 1996, Casey et al., 1997, Sly and Stillwell, 1997, Dex and McCulloch, 1997, Felstead et al., 1999), so they have been seen as increasingly relevant for older people. In 1994, flexible working

was a main recommendation of the Advisory Group on Older Workers, a Government committee set up under the Conservative Government to propose measures which would encourage employers to practice age diversity in employment (Dibden and Hibbett, 1993). The report, introduced by its chair Ann Widdecombe, the Employment Minister at that time, saw flexible job opportunities¹ as one of five ways in which employers could make better use of the skills, reliability and experience of older people (Employment Department Group, 1994). The report said:

"Such flexibility may be suited to older people, many of whom may not want to work full-time – or who are looking for a smoother transition from full-time work to retirement."

(Employment Department Group, 1994, pp. 27-28)

In a similar vein, a Cabinet report endorsed by the Labour Government in 2000 advocated greater access to flexible working arrangements² for those older workers who wanted them (Cabinet Office, 2000). The report, produced by the Performance and Innovation Unit with an introduction by the Prime Minister Tony Blair, listed the need for flexibility in working practices as one of 75 'conclusions' designed to improve employment opportunities for people aged 50 to 65. In particular, the report urged that the Department for Education and Employment promote the benefits of flexible work. These and other recommendations were accepted by the Government and seen as *"a challenging blue-print for action"* to be taken forward by Alistair Darling in his new role as Cabinet Champion for Older People and Chair of the Ministerial Group on Older People.

The value of flexible work was also raised by another Government-led initiative: the multidisciplinary Foresight programme, run by the Department of Trade and Industry (Foresight Ageing Population Panel, 2000). The Ageing Population Panel of *Foresight*, made up of government, business and research representatives, was charged with devising a strategic plan in response to the projected increase in the proportion of older people. Older workers were seen as

¹ The term covered part-time and temporary working, short-term contracts, flexi-time, job-sharing and phased retirement.

² The term covered part-time working, consultancy or project work for short periods, reduced working hours and partial retirement.

forming a potential supply of flexible labour for companies (Foresight Ageing Population Panel, 2000, p. 10) and as such represented a clear business opportunity.

2.4.2. Flexible employment for older workers: a campaigning issue

The mantle was also taken up by campaigning groups. For instance, The Debate of the Age, a UK-wide forum for discussion, awareness-raising and advocacy co-ordinated by Age Concern and launched in 1998, published a report of proceedings in which growing workplace flexibility - in particular more self-employment, part-time jobs and 'portfolio' working - was seen as an inevitable and important development with potential for older people (Debate of the Age, 2000, p. 92). In addition, the Debate advocated more flexible opportunities to foster the blurring of work and non-work boundaries, in other words to end static and enforced retirement dates for those workers who wished it (Midwinter, 2000, p. 6).

An OECD report on national responses to the decline in the participation of older workers suggested that future policies in the UK should promote the notion of 'portfolio' jobs (OECD, 1995a). This would allow older individuals *"to organise their working lives more in tune with their capacities (health, financial resources, leisure)"* whilst taking advantage of an increasingly flexible labour market (OECD, 1995a, p. 264). The International Labour Organization recommended that member states actively encourage a flexible transition from work to retirement, so that older workers could choose when they ended paid employment (Auer and Fortuny, 1999, Box 5, p. 25 & p. 34)³.

2.4.3. Flexible employment for older workers: the portfolio-type career

Meanwhile, business and career writers were describing new, individualised forms of flexible work - such as 'portfolio careers', 'protean careers' and 'boundaryless' careers - which would lead to a revolution in the way people managed their working lives (Handy, 1991, Handy, 1995, Hall and

³ The idea of flexible transitions into retirement was first advocated by the ILO in 1980. See Older Workers Recommendation, 1980 (no. 162), adopted at the 66th Session of the 1980 International Labour Conference. Cited in Auer, Box 5, p.34.

Mirvis, 1995, Hall and Mirvis, 1999, Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Older people with the right skills and attitudes were seen as well placed to take advantage of such changes.

Charles Handy saw the 'portfolio career' as offering a flexible and satisfying alternative to the lifelong, all-consuming corporate career (Handy, 1990, Handy, 1991, Handy, 1995). Mature people were advantageously positioned to take up the growing opportunities for consultancy work, freelancing and other types of out-sourced jobs. They had the experience, wisdom and skills to manage a different kind of employment relationship. The added advantage was the freedom it gave individuals to tailor-make their own careers. They could take on work as they wished, blend it with whatever other options they chose and design the perfect, balanced lifestyle. This might involve a medley of paid, voluntary and caring assignments, assembled and reviewed over time.

The portfolio career was especially suited to older people, according to Handy, because of their weakening position as employees:

"Many careers are now ending for people in their fifties. They are simply becoming too expensive to have around all the time when they also have to be given somewhere to sit, kept warm, serviced with coffee, with secretarial help maybe, given a pension and often a car. Thrust, against their will, outside the organization, they find that most organizations are only prepared to offer them bits and pieces of work. Portfolio careers are forced upon them, not from choice but from necessity."

(Handy, 1990, p. 216)

Older people were, and would continue to remain, less suitable for core jobs, according to Handy:

"It will be called age discrimination, no doubt, but we shall come to realize that high energy jobs in the knowledge-based organizations of the future do require younger people... We shall become used to the idea that the full-time executive or skilled worker fades in his or her late forties, in most occupations... It is happening already today in those organizations whose only assets are their talented people – in advertising, in consultancy, in design – the

energy roles are increasingly going to people in their thirties and forties, with the wisdom roles 'confined to Tuesdays'."

(Handy, 1991, p.148)

Such an argument sounds rather misplaced today, given the number of reports published more recently, challenging the inevitability of universal decline among older workers (Employment Department Group, 1994, Employers Forum on Age, 1996, Worsley, 1996, Department for Education and Employment, 1998). But it is even more curious given Handy's own prolific output - and requisite energy levels - as a self-styled *"portfolio person"*.

Whilst in his late fifties and 60s, Handy frequently described how he made his living as a writer and educator, working with a range of organisations in business, government, health and education (Handy, 1990, p. 213, Stonham, 1995, p. 381). He used his own experiences to explore the beauty of the 'portfolio' career. These were, firstly, its equilibrium, which could be maintained by a continual tweaking of the mix and nature of paid and unpaid responsibilities. Secondly, a 'portfolio' life meant liberation and independence from formal employment and a measure of control over how time was spent (Handy, 1991). Thirdly, the 'portfolio' worker need never finally retire, if they were not inclined to do so (House of Commons Employment Committee, 1989, p. xiii, Arkin, 2001). People could continue to do as much or as little paid work as they chose, for as long as they wanted.

Once on the outside of organisations, individuals could explore new talents, add variety and learn new skills. Age became far less relevant for the professional or technical expert, according to Handy, as long as skills were kept current, since clients were more interested in talent than chronological age (Handy, 1995, p. 192).

Other authors were equally bold in advocating self-management as a career survival strategy in later life. For instance, Drucker saw older workers as capable of a 50-year working life, as long they were prepared for *"more than one job, more than one assignment, more than one career"* (Drucker, 1999, p. 163). Likewise, Hall and Mirvis said that older workers now had to rely on their own efforts to survive in the labour market, rather than relying on the organisation to provide direction and

planning (Hall and Mirvis, 1994, Hall and Mirvis, 1995, Hall and Mirvis, 1999). Older individuals needed to become life-long learners, to refresh skills, to jump from one career cycle to the next. In other words, they had to be as adaptable to change as the fully flexible and adaptable organisation of today.

Such authors were highly influential in shaping the debate over employment solutions for older workers. Their ideas were taken up by other authors, such as Greenbury, 1994 and Bridges, 1995, and by policy-makers keen to find innovative solutions to relatively intractable difficulties in labour market retention for older workers. Vocational guides to one form of portfolio-type employment - freelancing - saw the inherent lack of fixed retirement thresholds as ideal for those in their 50s and older (Gray, 1987, p. 25-6, Laurance, 1988, p.14, Marriott and Jacobs, 1995, p.3). Freelancing meant that discrimination on grounds of age was far less significant and individuals were judged on what they could do rather than whether their face fitted (Marriott and Jacobs, 1995, p.3).

A number of studies, meanwhile, suggested that older people were keen to continue working as long as the right kind of flexible jobs were available. Research by the U.S. pressure group AARP (American Association for Retired Persons) on the Baby Boom generation, defined as those born between 1946 and 1964, found that 8 out of 10 wanted to work at least part-time during their retirement (AARP, 1999, p. 3).

2.5. Changes in corporate life

The scale of organisational restructuring and its effects on the employment relationship generally have been widely discussed in the UK literature (e.g. Pahl, 1995, Brown, 1997, Herriot et al., 1998) as well as in the U.S. (see, for instance, Doeringer, 1991, Cappelli et al., 1997, Cappelli, 1999). The impact on older workers specifically has been taken up by a number of authors (Kantor, 1994, Henretta, 1994, Hall and Mirvis, 1994, Quadagno et al., 1996, Useem, 1999, Cappelli, 1999). They suggest that older workers have been affected disproportionately by the loosening of hierarchies

within organisations, the decline of the 'Fordist' life cycle⁴, and the restructuring of large organisations.

Research in the UK found that older male and female employees were more likely to be made redundant than younger people (except for the under 25s age group, where redundancy rates were higher) and once unemployed, found it harder to find secure re-employment (Field, 1997, Walker and Maltby, 1997, Table 5.3, p. 77). The presence of greater proportions of older workers in declining manufacturing industries meant they were especially vulnerable to displacement⁵. This is supported by a small body of case study research on the experiences of UK managers in organisations undergoing change. In the various work settings explored by McGovern et al (McGovern et al., 1998), Mulholland (Mulholland, 1998), and Cohen and Mallon (Cohen and Mallon, 1999), loyal, long-serving employees were seen as vulnerable, expendable and out-of-place. Older individuals had fled organisations rather than compromise their own strongly-felt value systems. In Mulholland's study of managerial careers in two of the UK's privatised utility companies, corporate management saw the need for 'new blood' and for people who were not carrying the 'baggage' of 40 years of nationalised industry culture (Mulholland, 1998).

At the same time, Lyon et al argued that the introduction of human resource management practices in the workplace had disadvantaged older employees (Lyon et al., 1998). The emphasis within organisations on individual development on the one hand, and the need for adaptability, change and loyalty on the other, had led to a paradoxical position for older workers. By their length of service, these mature members of the workplace were seen as part of the pre-existing order. In the eyes of seniors managers, their tenure marked them out as pre-dating the advocates of change, whatever that change might be, and as being the most likely to resist new ways of working, thinking and belonging. Strategic human resource management theory, so the argument went, emphasised the importance of making maximum use of a company's most precious resource, its personnel. But

⁴ The 'Fordist life cycle', according to Quadagno et al, was an explicit deal which guaranteed lifetime work and protection against unemployment and old age. For older workers, this meant a decent retirement and pensions package. This 'charter', although not available to everyone, was common in unionised manufacturing industries, public sector organisations, and service sectors at the upper management level in the post-war period. In the last two decades, however, the protective agreements have been eroded. In their place have come different kinds of employment contracts, typified by the banking industry where mergers, restructuring and 'downsizing' have led to far more precarious working conditions (Quadagno et al., 1996).

⁵ However, recent research by Campbell suggested that older workers were no more likely to be retained by expanding firms than shrinking ones (Campbell, 1999, p. 39).

its terminology and priorities had divested older people of the necessary attributes. As a result, they had been relegated to a buffer role as a labour reserve.

2.6. Age discrimination in employment

These studies were part of a larger volume of research pointing to endemic age barriers in recruitment, retention, promotion and training (Thompson, 1991, Warr and Pennington, 1993, Walker and Taylor, 1993, Itzin and Phillipson, 1993, Taylor and Walker, 1994, Arrowsmith and McGoldrick, 1996, Austin Knight, 1996, Taylor and Walker, 1998, Burchell et al., 1999a).

Organisations were seen as using early retirement packages, including relatively generous redundancy and pension incentives, to ease older workers out of full-time jobs (Platman and Tinker, 1998).

Atchley (1993) suggested that ageism was an inevitable consequence of organisations wanting or needing to change:

"The challenge coming from older employees is seldom direct; it more often consists of institutional memory. When the "new brooms" are attempting to "sweep clean," they do not want to be informed about insights gained in the struggle and compromise it took to create that which they blithely seek to destroy. As they attempt to impose rationality through job descriptions and performance appraisals, they do not want to hear about the decades of real-world negotiations that it took to produce a highly effective personalized job for a specific individual. And given the politics of age in the workplace, it is little wonder that most older workers retire at the earliest age possible. As age increases, those who are not at the top of an organization's hierarchy often find themselves being treated in increasingly impersonal, discriminatory, and demeaning ways."

(Atchley, 1993, p. 7)

The response to this burgeoning evidential archive of age disadvantage was a succession of charters, codes and campaign documents designed to persuade and encourage the retention of older workers. These were issued by a variety of institutions, from professional associations

(Institute of Personnel Management, 1991, Wilson, 2000) to public sector advisory bodies (Local Government Management Board, 1995), campaigning groups (Eurolink Age, 2000) to Government departments (Employment Department Group, 1994, Cabinet Office, 1998, Department for Education and Employment, 1999). In addition, there were the compendiums of best practice case studies and human resources arguments promoting the business benefits of a mixed age workforce (Worsley, 1996, Employers Forum on Age, 1996, Employers Forum on Age, 1997a, Employers Forum on Age, 1997b, Walker and Taylor, 1998). Companies like the do-it-yourself retailer B & Q were championed at frequent intervals in Government reports and the media for introducing 'age-friendly' employment policies. In fact, so regular was the association between older workers and the B & Q retail chain that the public would have been forgiven for believing that no other organisation had achieved such success in harnessing the skills of mature and experienced labour.

Running counter to these public pleas for employer enlightenment on age was a scepticism in certain quarters over whether these workplace barriers could ever be surmounted without sustained Government intervention, particularly in the form of age discrimination legislation. At a more fundamental level, there was a growing debate about the degree to which ageism was embedded in the rules and structures of society. A main source of this structural disadvantage was the presence of the institution of retirement (Graebner, 1980, Kohli, 1991). Enforced retirement had created barriers to opportunity and led to the marginalisation of older workers (Walker, 1980, Townsend, 1981, Walker and Taylor, 1993).

In Kohli's view, work was central to the functioning of Western nations. It was...

"...a reality not only of the economy but also of culture and life-world; it emphasizes how people are engaged into society, in other words, how social life in the broadest sense is regulated. The impact of work goes far beyond simply assuring material survival or organizing economic and political interests; by providing the legitimate basis for the allocation of life chances in a very broad sense, it defines the cultural unity of modern society as well as the identity of its members."

(Kohli, 1991, pp. 276-7)

Enforced retirement had far-reaching consequences, then, for large groups of older people (Kohli, 1988, Kohli, 1991). Retirement truncated the life span and separated those who were productive (those in paid work) from those who were not. Individuals were expected to prepare extensively for work, spend a substantial part of their lives engaged in work, and then be cast aside at an instant (Young and Schuller, 1991).

The lack of age discrimination legislation in the UK was seen as further proof that the Government had placed age low down on its list of economic and political priorities (Taylor and Walker, 1997). Government campaigns urging voluntary age diversity were depicted as token gestures to placate an increasingly vocal age lobby whilst satisfying an industry united against further workplace constraints. At the employer level, financial packages consisting in varying degrees of an occupational pension, a redundancy lump sum and/or an early retirement incentive served to lure older workers out of long-service jobs and into long-term insecurity.

According to Estes et al, the state was torn between two conflicting fiscal priorities (Estes et al., 1996). The first of these was to support businesses by creating the most advantageous employment conditions. This involved the need to resist calls for age discrimination legislation, as in the UK, and frame redundancy legislation so that employers could shed people with the longest tenures in order to allow new 'blood'. The second, opposing financial pressure was to provide social security programmes supporting the unemployed and retired, in particular, those older workers who had lost their jobs.

In summary, then, flexible employment when applied to the ageing UK population was an alluring concept. Although rarely described in such explicit terms, it appeared to offer manifold benefits:

- a) For policy makers, flexible work extended careers and so reduced welfare benefits spending, increased revenue from income tax and proved to the nation that the talents of an ageing workforce were being harnessed;**
- b) For older individuals, flexible jobs promised to inject choice, control and independence into their working lives;**

- c) *For organisations, managers could continue to shed redundant, older labour whilst retaining a reserve army of reliable, knowledgeable and experienced workers;*
- d) *For society as a whole, flexible employment promoted the idea of social 'inclusion' for marginal groups of older people in the labour market.*

Flexible jobs represented the means by which older people could overcome structural employment barriers; inject choice into the final phase of their working lives; and tailor-make their employment commitments to fit in with their life stage and circumstance. Such jobs could address 'the problem' of age-specific labour market exclusion with a range of responses, thus undermining justifications for state intervention, and especially calls for age discrimination legislation.

Such jobs would allow employers to sever expensive and open-ended commitments to full-time, permanent and tenured jobs, whilst still retaining talent, knowledge and institutional memory. They would also allow the Treasury to reduce welfare benefits and improve income from tax revenues in an otherwise inactive population. Older people would also appear beneficiaries, since they could find paid employment.

The extent to which this was actually a viable proposition was a matter of conjecture. Concrete evidence was to be found neither in a series of theoretical debates on workplace change, nor in an extensive empirical literature on the incidence and nature of flexible employment in the UK. These two contrasting literatures left unanswered questions about the suitability of portfolio-type work for older people.

2.7. Changes to employment, the workplace and the retirement experience

Three debates about employment transitions are seen as relevant to this study. The first concerns the blurring of work endings in later life and the fragmentation of established retirement patterns. The second centres on changes to the employment relationship and, especially, to the so-called 'psychological contract' between managers and their staff. The final debate of relevance focuses on risk and insecurity in the workplace (as well as in society at large). These debates will now be examined in more detail.

2.7.1. Transitions from work to retirement

Early writings on the structural barriers faced by older people in the UK workplace were influenced by empirical studies of traditional industries like steel (Westergaard et al., 1989, Young and Schuller, 1991). This meant that authors tended to neglect the position of older workers in new and expanding industries, and the ability of older workers to opt for, and survive in, the flexible labour market.

More recently, a number of researchers began to cast doubt on the status of retirement as an enduring, universal benchmark, especially for men. Instead of the stereotypical job-for-life which ended in simultaneous exit from the organisation and labour market, writers described a new, more volatile and ambiguous phase between the end of formal work and the beginning of formal retirement (Laczko, 1989, Schuller, 1989).

Authors like Guillemard and Riley et al argued that traditional age barriers dividing work and retirement were becoming more flexible, with greater opportunities for a diverse range of roles and responsibilities in later life (Guillemard, 1997, Riley et al., 1999). At the same time, this had eroded the "orderly passage from work to leisure", causing an uncertain end to paid employment (Guillemard, 1997, p. 455).

"It is impossible to foresee one's life course. The order of stages, or ages, is imprecise and uncertain. The temporal horizon corresponding to definitive exit from work has become blurred. Today, no one working in the private sector knows at what age and under what conditions he/she will definitively stop working later in life. Retirement is a receding horizon...The last stage of work life is in disarray."

(Guillemard, 1997, pp. 455-6)

People were increasingly left to their own devices in a more volatile and unpredictable age, leading to increasing diversity and heterogeneity in later life (Henretta, 1994, Disney et al., 1994).

The question neglected by the political economy theorists on the one hand (e.g. Townsend, 1981, Walker and Taylor, 1993) and social stratification theorists on the other (e.g. Henretta, 1994, Riley et al., 1994b) was the potential impact of the portfolio-type job. Could such employment, undertaken beyond the boundaries of large and formal institutions, allow older workers to circumvent ageist structures? Might the portfolio career represent a twilight zone where older individuals could operate in relative safety, neither officially retired nor fully, visibly employed? Alternatively, if the edifice of retirement was crumbling, then surely the cut-off point which cast aside working people at a certain age, irrespective of abilities, preferences or aptitude, was open to negotiation? To what extent did portfolio-type working or self-employment allow individuals to construct their own route map through profound and continuous change? Was it a way for individuals to remake their work identities in a new era of insecurity?

2.7.2. *The re-formulation of the employment 'contract'*

Meanwhile, career, management and organisational theorists were discussing the impact of workplace change on the employment 'contract'. The relationship between employers and their staff was seen as having been altered fundamentally by decades of financial and business controls leading to company restructuring, redundancies, job redesign and performance-related pay (Herriot et al., 1998). As a result, authors believed that loyalty and commitment had been eroded and job security undermined (Doeringer, 1991, Cappelli et al., 1997, Gallie et al., 1998, Cappelli, 1999, Burchell et al., 1999a).

Despite scepticism over the extent of transformation within British organisations (e.g. Storey and Sisson, 1990), a growing number of authors turned their attention to discussing the effects of such change on a strategically managed workforce. Corporate memory and knowledge sharing had become key themes in discussions over competitive advantage (Mabey et al., 1998). How, then, were employers managing to foster these elements whilst still pursuing short and medium-term goals?

One debate which attracted increasing attention in academic and practitioner journals, and at management conferences, was over the meaning, legitimacy and practical utility of the phrase 'the psychological contract' (see, for instance, the special issue of the Journal of Organizational

Behavior on "The Psychological Contract at Work", 1998, volume 19). Authors like Guest saw this not in rigid, legalistic terms but as a helpful, hypothetical construct in analysing the changing relationship between employers and employees (Guest, 1998). Sparrow and Cooper defined the term as:

"... a set of unwritten reciprocal expectations, beliefs, or perceptions that characterize both mutual behaviour delivered within the employment relationship and implied obligations and promises."

(Sparrow and Cooper, 1998, p. 360)

Embodied in this definition, and in writings more generally, was the belief that expectations and promises between employers and employees mattered. Productivity, efficiency and business survival could be influenced by the degree of harmony between what managers and staff thought they had agreed and what they actually delivered. Such 'contracts' were unwritten and explicit, but nevertheless subject to violation.

The precise boundaries of the psychological contract were explored in some detail by Herriot et al (Herriot et al., 1997). In their interviews with employers and employees, they discovered 12 obligations which staff felt they could expect of their organisations, such as fairness in selection, appraisal, promotion and redundancy; justice and consistency in the application of rules and disciplinary procedures; consultation and communication over matters which affected them; recognition of or reward for a special contribution or long service; a safe and congenial work environment; equitable pay, consistently applied across the organisation; job security, where possible; adequate induction and training; time off to meet personal or family needs.

The question which these authors failed to ask, as did the majority of other writers on the subject of the psychological contract, was the list's relevance to, firstly, those workers based outside of the organisation and, secondly, to the oldest members of the labour force. Did portfolio-type or freelance workers also expect adequate training, time off to meet personal needs, fairness in the way they were selected for assignments, rewards for lengthy service and consultation over affairs that would affect them? The literature was concerned primarily with permanent, in-house

employees and, with few exceptions (e.g. McLean Parks et al., 1998, Millward and Brewerton, 1999), had little to say about the expectations of the growing numbers of out-house individuals who worked for multiple clients. How did these 'contingent' workers view the obligations of their clients? What form did their psychological contracts take? What happened when such basic 'rights' were ignored? Were there implications for the long-term viability of freelance work, in that frequent or substantial violations might lead to distrust, low commitment and disenchantment? In particular, how might older freelancers see the obligations of clients, given their lengthy experience in the jobs market and their likelihood of having spent at least some of their working lives as members of staff?

2.7.3. Risk and insecurity in the workplace

A broader, more theoretical discourse was underway, meanwhile, over the nature of changes to society at large. Authors such as Giddens (1991), Beck (1992, 2000), Sennett (1998) and Rose (1999) were publishing texts which described Western nations as laced with risk and insecurity. Individuals, according to Giddens, were now engaged in perpetual risk assessment in order to navigate their way through the processes and pressures which affected their lives:

"The more or less constant, profound and rapid momentum of change characteristic of modern institutions, coupled with structured reflexivity, mean that on the level of everyday practice as well as philosophical interpretation, nothing can be taken for granted. What is acceptable/appropriate/recommended behaviour today may be seen differently tomorrow in the light of altered circumstances or incoming knowledge-claims."

(Giddens, 1991, pp. 133-4)

As a result, *"thinking in terms of risk and risk assessment is a more or less ever-present exercise, of a partly imponderable character"* (Giddens, 1991, p. 124). Those who failed to examine the inherent dangers of modern life risked their livelihoods and life styles. Beck also saw the changes to western employment systems as indicative of the new 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). The occupation, the career, the organisation and paid work had become precarious and less visible entities. In the place of structured employment systems had come risk-fraught uncertainty in the

form of under-employment and insecurity on the one hand, and autonomy and discretion on the other. Critical to Beck's thesis was the idea that these pros and cons were "*indissolubly intermeshed*" (Beck, 1992, p. 144). In Beck's later work, he focused on the conundrum of the self-employed (Beck, 2000). They were free to live a life of their own, to be authors of their destinies. Yet this new culture of independence and individualisation brought with it insecurity.

As White (1996) explained, in his study of risk assessment in the labour market:

"A society of risk offers increased freedom and opportunity to those who through talent or luck can master the dangers or rise to the remaining safe ground, but it may leave others more exposed to disaster... Each person may increasingly be thrown back on her or his own strategy for coping with risks, as external supports themselves become at risk."

(White, 1996, p. 61)

In Rose's thesis on the powers of freedom (1999), explored in some detail in Chapter 7, individual choice had become the axis of living (Rose, 1999). But by pursuing a desire for control and liberty, individuals were forced to journey into a landscape riddled with uncertainty. The workplace became a place of vulnerability, rather than security.

A number of authors pointed to certain socio-economic groups which might be especially vulnerable to such insecurities. For instance, Castells (1996) saw a polarisation between workers according to gender, ethnicity and age (as well as between sectors, territories and firms) as more important in the new network society than occupational differences (Castells, 1996). In their separate critiques of Beck's risk regime thesis, Ekinsmyth (1999) and Mythen (2001) point to the persistence of "*traditional inequalities*" such as class, gender, ethnicity and age - which they said Beck had downplayed - in mediating the experience of risk in the labour market (Ekinsmyth, 1999, Mythen, 2001, p. 19).

How, then, might older workers experience the freedoms and insecurities of the new individualised age of employment? How might they view their self-employed status and the inherent opportunities and risks?

2.8. The incidence and nature of flexible employment in the UK

This next section examines three main groups of empirical publications - statistical, vocational and experiential - with a relevance to portfolio employment in later life. These three publication types are:

- statistical analyses of data sources which chart the prevalence of flexible employment in the UK using a number of variables, including age;
- vocational literature on 'how to freelance'; and
- detailed research on the experiences of self-employment and portfolio-type work among small groups of informants.

2.8.1. Flexible employment: statistical analyses of data sources

Potentially, research which examines flexible working beyond the boundaries of the organisation could involve a great many employment states, such as temporary, casual and contract work, self-employment, agency employment, freelancing, homeworking and consultancy (Felstead and Jewson, 1999). It conforms most closely to the "*numerical flexibility*" category listed in Dex and McCulloch's five-point typology of flexible forms (Dex and McCulloch, 1997). This is defined as the ability of firms to adjust the supply of workers to demand. But three of their other categories might also be relevant: firstly, labour market flexibility or mobility (the ease with which labour transfers between organisations and industries); secondly, working time flexibility (the variation in the number and timing hours worked during any one week, month or year); and thirdly, place of work flexibility (working outside the office, for instance as a homeworker).

Specifically in the literature on 'the problem' of older workers, the notion of flexible work appears to mean either one or a combination of the following:

1. Part-time work, usually defined as involving no more than 30 hours of employment a week;
2. Temporary work through agencies;
3. Temporary work under short or long-term contracts working directly for the employer;
4. Self-employment as entrepreneurship, i.e. with employees;

5. Self-employment without employees, as a sole trader;
6. Home-working as an independent contractor or as an employee.

However, extracting data on flexible employment trends among older workers from statistical studies is beset with difficulty. Authors tend to adopt a variety of definitions of flexibility, set different time parameters for their measurements and use different data sources, gathered for different purposes. Even the language of flexibility varies between studies. Terms include *non-standard employment*, *atypical employment*, *new forms of work*, *destandardised labour*, *hyphenated work*, *the contingent workforce*, or *the marginal or secondary labour market*.

Casey et al has criticised "*the dearth of nationally representative data*" on flexible working patterns (Casey et al., 1997). Even the best available and most fruitful sources like the Labour Force Survey and the Workplace Employee Relations Survey were not designed to explore such issues, they say, and are, consequently, inadequate for the task. The growing variety of workplace contracts, and the blurring of external and internal sourcing of labour, represents a formidable challenge for researchers in designing sensitive and adequate analytical frameworks (Cully et al., 1999). Particularly problematic, according to Burchell et al, are freelancers since they may work for a number of separate employers or clients (Burchell et al., 1999b).

Studies not only differ in the numbers and types of flexible forms they choose to study, but, invariably, select different dimensions of those flexible forms. For instance, two studies published in the same year focused on divergent elements of self-employment for analysis. Dex and McCulloch, 1997, included only the self-employed without employees (in addition to part-timers and temporary workers) in their examination of a range of statistical sources to chart the incidence and future growth of flexible working (Dex and McCulloch, 1997). Casey et al, meanwhile, included only those self-employed who were homeworkers and sub-contractors (in addition to part-time, temporary, casual and shift workers) in their investigation into employers' use of flexible labour (Casey et al., 1997). Yet, both these interpretations may be relevant to a study of freelancing or portfolio-type work.

Likewise, definitions of temporary work vary. Atkinson et al's postal survey of British employers used temporary work as an umbrella category covering any kind of fixed period employment, such

as casual, seasonal and contract work, and involving agency temps, freelancers, external consultants and the self-employed (Atkinson et al., 1996, p. 5). In contrast, the Workplace Employee Relations Survey, a national survey of British workplaces, separated these temporary workers into three categories for analysis: short fixed-term contracts; temporary workers from employment agencies; and a third group of freelance workers, homeworkers and outworkers (Millward et al., 2000). As aggregates, the figures might tally. But such diverse definitions make comparisons between different types of temporary labour difficult, not to mention the complexity of extracting age-related trends.

As a category, flexible older workers appear to fall between stools, neither central to statistical analyses of flexible working nor to analyses of trends among the oldest sections of the (working) population. For instance, Beatson's examination of the growth of flexibility in the British labour market ignored age entirely as a variable (Beatson, 1995). Other studies involving the secondary analysis of employment data sets restrict their enquiries to the population of working age, thus excluding men aged 65+ and women aged 60+ (e.g. Dex and McCulloch, 1997).

Meanwhile, analyses of employment patterns in later life based on the Retirement Survey, a cohort study of 3,500 individuals aged 55 to 69 interviewed in 1988-89 and then again in 1994, were concerned largely with shifts between employment, unemployment and retirement (Disney et al., 1994, Disney et al., 1997). There was a lack of detail on employment states such as temporary contracts, consultancy and part-time work which were relevant to transitions into retirement.

One study which did examine patterns of self-employment, part-time working and temporary work for men and women aged up to age 69 - McKay and Middleton's secondary analysis of the Family and Working Lives Survey⁶ - relied on small sample numbers in the upper age groups (McKay and Middleton, 1998). Specifically in the self-employment sub-category, there were only 40 self-

⁶ McKay and Middleton were commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment to analyse characteristics of older workers by conducting a secondary analysis of the Family and Working Lives Survey. This survey, undertaken in 1994-1995, gathered work history data for around 9,000 people aged 16 to 69. This relied to a large extent on retrospective data about major life events, including job categories over time. Surveys of this kind are open to criticism because of the dangers of faulty or partial recall by respondents recounting events which happened some time ago (see e.g. Dex, 1991). Another criticism of the McKay and Middleton study is its lack of longitudinal perspective, since the findings are specific to one cohort of older people.

employed men and 12 self-employed women who were aged 60 to 69 years (McKay and Middleton, 1998, Figure 4.1(b), p. 35).

Nevertheless, by examining a range of studies in the UK, it is possible to see an overall picture of the increasing prevalence of flexible jobs among older people. Self-employment not only rose with age for men aged 55 to 69, but grew in importance as a job category over time (Casey and Laczko, 1992). Those people over state retirement age who were still working were more likely to be in temporary, part-time or contractual positions than in permanent, full-time ones. Although there is a lack of detail on sub-groups of temporary and self-employed workers in the upper age bands, the overall trend suggests that flexible employment has become a more common feature of working life for older men and women. This is particularly the case for men in the 55 to 64 years age category (Felstead et al., 1999).

These trends will be examined in greater detail below.

2.8.1.1. Part-time work

The McKay and Middleton study confirmed findings elsewhere that women were far more likely to work part-time than men, at all ages. This was especially so for women aged from around 30 to 55 years. Women over 50 who were still in work were more likely to be part-time than full-time (McKay and Middleton, 1998). Although few men below retirement age were employed part-time, it was the most common form of work for men over retirement age (Casey and Laczko, 1992, Table 9.3, p. 142).

2.8.1.2. Temporary and seasonal working

The percentage of people in temporary jobs was highest among the young and old (Atkinson et al., 1996, McKay and Middleton, 1998). For the older group, there was little gender variation, but a substantial rise in the proportions undertaking this kind of work once men and women past their respective state pension ages. For instance, around 20% of men aged 65 to 69 who were still in work said their job was either temporary or seasonal, double the figure for the five-year period

before they qualified for state pensions. Similar proportions were found by Casey and Laczko using the Labour Force Surveys (Casey and Laczko, 1992).

2.8.1.3. Self-employment

A number of studies have found that self-employment is more prevalent among older than younger workers, and especially among men (Casey and Laczko, 1992, Taylor, 1997, McKay and Middleton, 1998, Moralee, 1998, Office for National Statistics, 1999, Knight and McKay, 2000, Scales and Scase, 2000). The self-employment rate increases with age, especially among those over 60 years . As Table 2.1. below shows, more than one in five workers in their early 60s who were still active in the UK labour market were self-employed. This rate rose to more than one in three for those in the 65 years and above age group.

Table 2.1. Self-employment rates* by age: UK 1997							
<i>Labour Force Survey, spring quarters</i>							
	Age groups						
	16-24	25-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	Total
Self-employment rate (%)	3.3	11.8	15.5	17.3	21.7	36.3	12.5

Source: (Moralee, 1998, Table 3, p. 124).

* The self-employment rate is the proportion of all those in employment who are self-employed, self-employment status assessed by respondents. To clarify, column 1 shows that 3.3% of all the 16-24 year-olds in employment in 1997 saw themselves as self-employed.

For professionals in particular, self-employment rose steadily for each age group (Scales and Scase, 2000, Chart 3.14, p. 19). Self-employed workers were found to retire at significantly later ages than employees in all OECD countries (OECD, 1998). Of particular relevance to this study was the trend towards increasing 'solo' self-employment, i.e. those *without* employees, since these accord more closely to the image of the portfolio worker. Casey and Laczko found that it was the proportion of these solo self-employed which had grown the fastest between 1979 and 1984, especially among the over 65s (Casey and Laczko, 1992, see also Dex and McCulloch, 1997). A European Commission study of self-employment among older people in small and medium-sized

enterprises found that many older entrepreneurs only wished to employ themselves, and on a part-time basis (Peters et al., 1999).

McKay and Middleton concluded that older people who were self-employed tend to have been so for many years (McKay and Middleton, 1998). Self-employment was a relatively stable employment state for the typical older self-employed worker. However, they did find evidence that these long-time self-employed workers were then joined by a group of new entrants later on, who were switching to self-employment from unemployment in their mid-to-late 50s and from employment in their late-50s to early 60s. These later entrants were more likely to have been made redundant or experienced a company merger or takeover than those entering self-employment at a younger age. Among the over 45s who went self-employed, 14% of late entrants (as against 6% of the long-time self-employed in this age group) had been made redundant; 7% (against 1%) had experienced a merger or take-over; and 4% had taken some form of retirement deal from their previous employer. This suggests that some later entrants were choosing self-employment as a means of survival in the labour market.

Overall, these patterns would suggest that self-employment is an increasingly common employment state for older workers. Yet these trends need qualifying. Firstly, although self-employment rates rise with age, these levels are largely a symptom of the small number of older people who are still economically active. An analysis of the Family and Working Lives Survey, a nationally representative dataset of more than 9,000 people aged 16-69 years, estimated that in 1994-5, there were only around 220,000 self-employed men and women over the age of 60 in the UK labour force (Knight and McKay, 2000). This compared with 850,000 employees in the same age range. Thus, high self-employment rates among the 65 plus age group are a product of the relatively few numbers of older people still with jobs of any kind.

Secondly, the rise in self-employment for older ages needs to be set against another trend, that of cohort-related change. Taylor's analysis of lifetime employment histories among British Household Panel Survey respondents found a fall in the average age of self-employed people over time (Taylor, 1997). Each birth cohort born from the 1920s onwards showed a rise in the self-employment rate; in other words, more people of working age were opting for self-employment in each successive cohort. However, the age at which this rate peaked fell from one cohort to the

next. The self-employment rate for the 1920s cohort peaked at 56 years, 55 years for the 1930s cohort and 51 years for the 1940s cohort. Like the average age of the workforce as a whole, the self-employed were becoming younger not older on average.

To summarise, although informative, these quantitative studies give a partial picture of flexible employment among older workers. Taking the statistical literature as a whole, there has been a reliance on imprecise and variable definitions of flexible work. Often separate employment forms, with different drivers and trajectories, are lumped together, such as freelancing with home-working, part-time employment with temporary work, and self-employment involving employees with solo self-employment. At the same time, secondary analyses of nationally representative labour force surveys have tended to exclude workers aged over 65 years of age, and sometime younger, from their samples. Studies which have included the over 65s have limited or non-existent data on different types of flexible jobs. As a result, it is difficult to interpret statistical data reliably in order to build a picture of flexible employment - and especially freelance employment - among older workers. Where researchers have examined flexible jobs among older people, there is some evidence of its increasing prevalence. However, the statistical picture offered by these studies is far from complete.

2.8.2 Vocational literature: the 'how to freelance' guides

This next section deals with a discrete but sizeable literature on freelancing in the UK. It is a vocational and non-academic literature about how to succeed as a freelancer. It is argued here that writers of these guides peddle a succession of optimistic stereotypes about freelancing. Although they frequently qualify their writings with cautionary tales or advice, the overwhelming impression is that it is 'the self', rather than the conditions operating in the economy, the industrial sector or the employing organisation, which hinders success as a freelancer. This leaves only the individual as the real barrier to sustaining a long-term career as a freelancer.

The substantial body of 'self-help' literature⁷ reviewed in this section amounted to 30 titles (listed in date order in Appendix 01) published in the UK from 1928 to 1999. These were titles about freelancing generally or in the media industry specifically, and catalogued by, and thus available for inspection at, the British Library⁸. The intention of this specialist literature review was to examine the spectrum of books on freelancing. However, it became apparent early on that books with 'freelancing' or 'freelance' in their title conformed to a type, irrespective of the decade or year of publication. Seven overarching features were identified.

Firstly, they were designed for the aspiring freelancer and, thus, were packed with practical hints, 'secrets' of success, cautionary stories and case histories. They offered 'a way in' to the freelance existence. There was the expectation that hidden inside titles like *"Perfect Freelancing: All you need to get it right first time"* (Marriott and Jacobs, 1995) or *"Successfully Going Freelance in a Week"* (Holmes, 1998) lay the route map for success. The prize was there for all to claim, as long as the individual read the book and followed the instructions.

Secondly, the sequential nature of these publications implied a logical order to the mastery of freelancing. This would generally take two forms: either as a timetable of activities or a list of potential work sources. Two books illustrate the first, staged approach well. Holmes' general guide to freelancing, *"Successfully Going Freelance in a Week"*, contained seven chapters, each representing a new building block in the freelance construction kit (Holmes, 1998). This orderly

⁷ It became apparent during the course of the research that a number of books had been written on the 'art' of freelancing. Rather than limit the research to books which had been recommended by individuals involved in the research, a decision was taken to conduct a systematic search on bibliographic databases using 'freelance' and 'freelancing' as the key search words. This revealed a sizeable number of UK and US published works dating from the 1920s on 'how to succeed' as a freelancer.

⁸ Although this was a substantial body of work, it was clear that it represented only a portion of the entire stock of freelance guides written in the English language. The British Library is legally entitled to receive one copy of every book published and/or distributed in the UK (British Library, 2000). This requirement under copyright law holds for all books irrespective of place of publication or printing, nature and size of imprint or extent of distribution. This means that books published and distributed abroad were not in the archive. Book publisher databases, such as Amazon's web-based operation (<http://www.amazon.co.uk>), showed there to be a substantial list of such books in the United States. In addition, it is unlikely that specialist freelance guides with small print runs intended for select audiences would have found their way to the British Library archive. As far back as 1935, Aldrich considered his guide to freelance journalism justified, despite the many other books which he said had been written on the subject (Aldrich, 1935). Yet the British Library catalogue suggested that only one other, similar book had preceded it: a pocket guide by Hyde in 1928 (Hyde, 1928). Finally, the most recent books on freelancing would still be awaiting classification and thus would not yet show up on the catalogue. Nevertheless, there were merits in using the British Library holdings as a selection tool: firstly, it produced a manageable number of publications which were readily accessible to an academic researcher; and secondly, it was likely to hold the most respected and widely available publications in the UK.

progression was found in a different form in Hall's *"How to Be a Freelance Journalist"* (Hall, 1995). She advocated a step-by-step approach consisting of five phases for those hobby writers who wished to turn into paid freelance professionals (Hall, 1995, Fig. 1, p. 20). An example of a book which listed potential work sources was the volume by Palmer, *"1000 Markets for Freelance Writers: an A-Z guide to general and specialist magazines and journals"* (Palmer, 1993).

A third feature of the 'how-to-freelance' literary type was the presence of the author as 'proof of the pudding'. Without exception, the authors were freelancers themselves and this featured prominently in the marketing blurb on or inside the book cover and frequently in the body of the text as well. Their specialisms might vary, from a freelance journalist to freelance copy-writer, freelance photographer to freelance marketing & design consultant. But their experiences were documented at regular intervals to prove that their freelance formula worked. Some authors took this to extremes. For instance, in Hall's book about freelance journalism, the author quoted from, and built case studies of, four working freelance journalists 'who had made it'. The author used herself as case study number four (Hall, 1995, pp. 148-151).

A fourth feature of these literary types was their promotion of freelancing as an attractive work option and a viable alternative to being an employee. Freelancing meant freedom, flexibility, variety and control. The title and sub-title of one freelance guide managed to capture this succinctly: *"The Freelance Alternative. For people who want Freedom, Challenge and Independence in their lives"* (Gray, 1987). Another guide, published five years later, offered a tempting glimpse of the possibilities in the opening paragraphs of the first chapter:

"I may be biased, but I happen to think that being a freelance writer is the most wonderful way of earning a living. There is nothing, except perhaps inherited wealth, which provides greater personal freedom and flexibility.

"Being a professional writer allows you to follow your own interests and develop yourself in any direction you choose. It gives you the freedom to live where you want and how you want, and to travel wherever and whenever the urge takes you. As a freelancer you never know when luck is going to drop some wonderful opportunity into your lap.

"Every morning when you wake up you know that something exciting may happen today. Maybe a publisher will ring up with a really big commission, a novel might be accepted, a huge star might agree to an interview, a magazine might buy an article or send you to Tahiti with all expenses paid, the film rights to a book could sell for thousands, or a major chat show host will want to interview you.

"Most days, of course, nothing happens, except more work. But every so often something comes along which reminds you of just how much is possible."

(Crofts, 1992, p. 7)

Possibly such descriptions might seem plausible to the novice freelancer. For the more seasoned professional, they appear faintly absurd.

Freelancing was an infinitely adaptable work form, according to this literature. It was appropriate for virtually any profession (Laurance, 1988) and virtually any employment group (Gray, 1987). In theory, individuals could make as much money as they chose by varying the intensity and timing of their work. They could save up to travel the world, to build a nest egg for retirement or simply choose freelancing as a way to escape the corporate in-house job (Laurance, 1988).

There were risks and hardships, of course. The 'how-to-freelance' literary type issued warnings to readers about the need for preparedness - a fifth feature of these books. This was not a job for the faint-hearted (Dobson, 1992). Clients might try to exploit the unwary (Irons, 1968). Only by reading the book in question could the fledgling and ambitious freelancer learn from others' bitter experience (Aldrich, 1935, p.7). The downsides to, or dangers of, freelancing served to further entice the reader by holding up proof of 'insider' knowledge. Only by knowing the pitfalls could freelancers devise ways to circumvent them. Forewarned was forearmed. Telling it 'like it was' had a triple effect: it gave the book an authentic feel; it prevented allegations of misrepresentation; and it made the book even more compelling to the uninitiated.

A further feature of this literature was its emphasis on individual endeavour. The way to succeed as a freelancer was through resilience and determination. Setbacks and challenges were inevitable,

but these could be surmounted with persistence and drive. Experience was seen as an asset in navigating the freelance minefield. In fact, a number of guides (e.g. Astbury, 1963, Gray, 1987, Crofts, 1992) saw older workers as ideally placed to take advantage of freelancing. Astbury's "practical guide" to freelance journalism, published in the early 1960s, viewed age as a positive advantage:

"There is one thing all would-be freelances must consider before taking the plunge, and that is age. From all points of view save that of security, the older one begins freelancing the better. The older man realises, better than the younger, with what little wisdom the economic affairs of this country are ordered; and such scepticism about the prosperous operations of those known to be fools can give self-confidence. The older man has more ideas about where work may be found or stimulated, and more experience in getting it; he knows better where to get information quickly, and how to write quickly... Most important of all, he has his contacts."

(Astbury, 1963, p. 17)

Finally, a seventh unifying feature of the 30 books under review was a clustering of features which were neglected. None was intended for the employer or manager (although their views were quoted on occasions); none reviewed, either critically or uncritically, previous publications on the same topic; and none questioned fundamentally the way freelancing was conceived or executed⁹. Accounts were anecdotal, ahistorical and accepting of existing regimes. These were guides to the terrain, not critiques aimed at reshaping the industrial landscape.

Although the above literature provides very little in the way of information about older freelancers, it does give an impression of the populist way in which freelancing is depicted.

⁹ A critical tone was taken, however, by the freelance photographer Raymond Irons in his book *"Freelance"*, published in the late 1960s (Irons, 1968). The inside blurb suggested an exposé, as did his conclusion, in which he claimed to have published *"the first true facts of freelancing in Britain"* (p. 116). His book had been self-published by the Raymond Irons Publishing Company – adding to the image of a *bête noire* among freelance book titles. In fact, his criticisms of freelancing were limited to low rates of pay and to the absence of a professional body prepared, he felt, to set and enforce decent minimum rates. The bulk of the book is a 'how-to-freelance' guide for photographers which conforms to the standard literary genre.

2.8.3. Flexible employment - the experiences of portfolio-type work

We now turn to a third group of publications: academic studies about the experiential side of self-employment and portfolio-type work. To what extent does this literature help us to understand whether older people are, firstly, well-positioned to take advantage of flexible job opportunities and, secondly, able to sustain such a form of employment for as long as they wish?

There now exists a large body of academic research about workers' experiences of self-employment, freelancing and portfolio careers. This often focuses on one occupational group or industry in order to examine the way individuals perceive life outside of the organisational mainstream. Examples include the study of:

- magazine freelancers (Starworth and Starworth, 1995, Ekinsmyth, 1999);
- freelance translators (Gold and Fraser, 2001);
- public sector professionals (Davies, 2001);
- health service managers (Mallon, 1998a, Mallon, 1998b);
- freelance journalists (Baines, 1999, Baines, 2000);
- electronic artists (Gill and Dodd, 2000); and
- freelance film and television workers (Weiss and Faulkner, 1983, Faulkner and Anderson, 1987, Jones, 1996, DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, Ursell, 2000, Blair, 2001).

These studies provide a wealth of detail about career identities, organisational disenchantment, pay levels and informal networking. A feature to emerge strongly from this empirical evidence is the intermeshing of positives and negatives, control and dependency, autonomy and uncertainty, in the working lives of the solo self-employed worker. Researchers found that individuals relished the freedom from office politics and the distance from internal wrangles (see particularly Rainbird, 1991, Mallon, 1998a, Mallon, 1998b, Cohen and Mallon, 1999). But they also highlight the isolation and remoteness, insecurity and uncertainty over the source of future assignments. Income was unpredictable, work flow insufficient for many and jobs allocated through (random) informal networks. Some portfolio workers described their relief at leaving an organisation which no longer valued them or shared their value systems and about the joy of regaining a sense of self-esteem. Life on the outside could be exciting, even exhilarating. But there had been "a series of tangible losses", such as in salaries, pensions and access to training (Cohen and Mallon, 1999, p. 347).

Thus, academic studies fought shy of the essentially optimistic views of freelancing promoted by the 'how to freelance' guides. However, like these self-help guides, they gave little attention to the concerns and practices of employers. Rarely do we hear the voices of the managers who commission and supervise the work of these self-employed individuals. Thus, these studies fail to examine the way employment is negotiated between individuals - specifically between employers and workers - on a day-to-day basis. Yet, the constraints, anxieties and pressures facing managers who commission such work are likely to be important determinants of an individual's success.

A further and more important feature of this body of research - shared with the vocational literature - is its neglect of age issues. Although research output has expanded rapidly in this area in the last few years, as the above list of research studies shows, and has increasingly addressed gender issues (e.g. Ekinsmyth, 1999, Gill and Dodd, 2000), the position of older workers remains neglected. Despite the promotion of this type of work as a possibly labour market 'solution', researchers have failed to address or discuss issues of particular concern to older portfolio-type workers, such as declining skills or dwindling networks. Yet, where such studies have singled out age-specific issues (amid a much wider agenda), the position of older people is seen as different in a number of crucial respects.

For instance, the electronic artists surveyed for Gill and Dodd's study of Europe's new media industry recognised that age was a far greater barrier to entry to their profession than gender, ethnicity or disability (Gill and Dodd, 2000, Graph 7.2a, p. 45). This was due to the perception that older people might lack the necessary information technology skills and that most new media products were targeted at the young. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to test such ideas further, since their sample was, itself, predominantly young - with a median age of around 28 years (Gill, 2001).

Ekinsmyth's study of magazine freelancers in the UK found concern over pensions and the effects of ageing among her sample (Ekinsmyth, 1999). Individuals who worked on the 'consumer glossies', those magazines aimed at the teens to thirties market, expected to find it more difficult to secure work as they aged. This was said to be due to the perceived need for, and availability of,

young, cheaper talent in order to service young readers, to the departure of known commissioners and to the limited number of alternative magazines which could provide older freelancers with work.

Conversely, Davies found that many of her oldest public sector interviewees found a renewed sense of status and vigour once they began their portfolio careers (Davies, 2001). Retirees who then went on to accept paid and unpaid positions on executive and advisory public bodies had been able to expand their knowledge, develop new strands of interest and continue to contribute to public life. Their self-designed portfolio lives, admittedly among an elite group of professionals, provides evidence that such careers can flourish in certain contexts. However, the majority of interviewees subsidised their public appointments through other means, such as private consultancy income, regular salaries and pensions.

To summarise, empirical studies about the experiences of portfolio-type work have increased exponentially in the last few years. They provide a mixed picture of freelancing and portfolio-type work for individuals. Largely neglected from studies are the self-employment experiences of older individuals and the views of line managers who employ them.

2.9. Summary

This chapter has reviewed a large, multidisciplinary literature to show, firstly, the appeal of flexibility and portfolio-type work as a solution for 'inactive' older workers and, secondly, the lack of research which tests directly its sustainability in later life. Research which can inform this current study suggests a complex picture of opportunity and constraint in the flexible labour market, especially for those aged 50 plus. Rarely, though, have we heard the voices of older workers in portraits of the experiential side of portfolio and freelance life. In Handy's depiction of the portfolio career, the point at which paid work ends, and the way in which it ends (whether abruptly or by degrees), is seen as a matter of career choice and sensible planning. The question neglected by authors is how, or whether at all, older entrepreneurial individuals can by-pass age barriers which might otherwise block their progress. Additionally, the degree of independence, choice and self-determination enjoyed by older portfolio workers is rarely tested.

At the same time, statistical data about older workers has been seriously lacking, resulting in uncertainties over the practical realities of solo self-employment in later years. We have heard that

the workplace has become increasingly risky, but to what extent might this be mediated by advancing age? Authors have suggested that age might be an enduring source of inequality in the new, endemically risky labour market, yet have failed to examine this in detail.

Equally, the literature is relatively silent on the expectations, obligations and long-term commitments felt by employers towards portfolio-type labour. Research into the 'psychological contract' has been concerned primarily with full-time members of staff. Little is known, firstly, about the concerns, policies and practices of employers who use freelance/portfolio labour, and, secondly, about employers' views on the attractions and disincentives of older workers fulfilling such roles. This has resulted in a lack of knowledge about the degree to which organisations are prepared or able to harness the skills, experience and institutional memories of older freelancers.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

3.1. Introduction

Before describing and justifying the methods used in this study, it is important to understand the research philosophy which underpins it. By this I mean the set of ideas which are fundamental to my view of the social world. A clear formulation of the nature of social reality at this stage of the thesis will provide a route map - to extend the metaphor used above - through a maze of philosophical possibilities, each offering its own version of the essence of things¹. The course that is followed dictates the approach to the pursuit of knowledge (discussed at the end of this chapter), and, in turn, to the design of this study. The deep-rooted social science philosophy that is chosen leads to a restricted, but hopefully useful and powerful range of methodological possibilities.

The research philosophy which informs this study is broadly that of critical realism. Realism comes in various shapes and sizes (Moser, 1999, p. 71). However, I am concerned here with the philosophical framework laid down in the late 1970s and 1980s by Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 1978, Bhaskar, 1979, Bhaskar, 1986, Bhaskar, 1989)² and explored (and elaborated on) by others (Outhwaite, 1987, Collier, 1994, Archer, 1995, Sayer, 1992, Sayer, 2000, Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). In particular, it is the writings of Margaret Archer which have been most influential in shaping the 'world view', or research philosophy, which underpins this study. Her thorough and impressive exposition of social realism – complementing Bhaskar's critical realism – offers a carefully constructed analysis of the workings of the social world. In essence, Archer, like Bhaskar, sees human beings and social structures as two distinctive but inter-related entities. Although separate and autonomous, they are transformed by, and are transforming of, each other. She labels her theory '*the morphogenetic approach*', in order to highlight the process by which people and their societies are elaborated, re-shaped and transformed (Archer, 1995, p. 75).

¹ For a general discussion on research philosophies in the social sciences, see: (Blaikie, 1993, Hughes and Sharrock, 1997, Crotty, 1998, Benton and Craib, 2001).

² Bhaskar was himself influenced by a number of writers but is seen as providing the most developed and influential version of the approach (Benton and Craib, 2001, p. 119).

This needs exploring in more detail. I shall do so, firstly, by examining the three contrasting 'world views' which Archer refutes and which 'morphogenesis' is said to replace. This allows her framework to be set into a historical context and for its distinctiveness to be appreciated. Secondly, I extract a number of basic tenets from her brand of social realism, supplementing these with the writings of Roy Bhaskar where appropriate. These two authors are said to have an alliance (Parker, 2000, p. 70), albeit one which they take in slightly different directions. Thirdly, I explore the emancipatory, or liberating, side to critical realism which Archer downplays but which is explicit in Bhaskar's work (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 187, Collier, 1994, p. 205) and in the work of other authors, such as Andrew Sayer's (Sayer, 2000). The 'critical' face of realism³ urges us to question, challenge and advocate solutions to misguided or ill-informed practices, and this presents us with a further agenda for a study of portfolio-type work in later life.

But firstly, why do Archer's ideas, underpinned by Bhaskar's scientific philosophy, offer such promise in my research endeavour? The answer is to be found in the dynamics of society: 'morphogenesis' hands sovereignty neither to human agents nor to social structures. This means that individuals - such as older freelance workers - can command a measure of independence, choice and creativity in determining outcomes. Equally, social structures, such as retirement policies, employment practices and the presence or lack of age discrimination legislation, are important influences on the way these individuals behave and thus on the composition of society. Each are regarded as separate entities and can be analysed as such, even though they mutate and affect each others' mutations. This is a powerful analytical framework for the study of creative professionals who wish to inject control and self-determination into their working lives. At the same time, such a framework recognises the wider structural limits to this autonomy, in terms of stratified opportunities in the media industry and in the labour market. 'Morphogenesis' frees us from theoretical perspectives which give pre-eminence either to the internal and subjective world of individuals or to dominating structures. Unlike 'middle way' perspectives, such as structuration (Giddens, 1984)⁴, human agents and social structures have distinctive properties which can be isolated from each other and thus studied separately.

³ Critical realism is itself a mutation of two complementary philosophies described by Roy Bhaskar: firstly, his general philosophy of science, 'transcendental realism'; and secondly, his specific philosophy of the human sciences, 'critical naturalism'. As he says in his book "Reclaiming Reality", these allied terms began to merge in the writings of others to become 'critical realism', and Bhaskar accepted the merits of such a merger (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 190).

⁴ See (Layder, 1994, chapter 8) and (Parker, 2000, chapter 5) for critiques of Giddens' structuration thesis.

3.2. Three contrasting world views

The relationship between individuals and structures is regarded as contested terrain by many of those who study society. In fact, some authors see this contest as the most enduring and fundamental of debates which has consumed social scientists for many decades (Layder, 1994, p. 221, Archer, 1995). Archer calls it *"the vexatious question of society"* and, in fact, the first chapter of her book on 'the morphogenetic approach' is titled as such (Archer, 1995, pp. 1-30). The debate takes many forms, say these authors. It has been depicted as the dichotomy between 'society' versus 'the individual', 'determinism' versus 'voluntarism', 'structure' versus 'agency' and 'macro' versus 'micro'. But the dispute is essentially the same, according to Archer. At one extreme, people are depicted as 'marionettes', powerless against higher, outside influences; at the other, they are 'puppet masters', in control of the shaping of their world (Archer, 1995, p. 65).

This vexatious problem, says Archer, is not confined to those who study society. In fact, it is faced by each of us, every day of our social lives:

"An inescapable part of our inescapably social condition is to be aware of its constraints, sanctions and restrictions on our ambitions... At the same time, an inalienable part of our human condition is the feeling of freedom: we are 'sovereign artificers' responsible for our own destinies, and capable of re-making our social environment..."

(Archer, 1995, p. 1)

Archer's mission is to reconcile the polarity and this she sets out to do in 'the morphogenetic approach'. However, Archer is careful to engage in a practical as well as a philosophical debate. It would be insufficient, she says, to provide a social theory divorced from the day-to-day realities of research. Her treatment of such seemingly irreconcilable entities hinges on an awareness of the methodological repercussions of her outline. Wary of entering into *"a marriage of inconsistent premisses"* (Archer, 1995, p. 5), she intends finding consistency between ontology, methodology and practical social theory. This she attempts to do in the first instance by exposing the inconsistencies in the three main 'world views' which pre-date 'the morphogenetic approach'.

The first of these 'world views' is what she deems the 'science of society' stance, in which social structures are dominant and agents are 'marionettes', moulded by society. The solution to the problem of the relationship between individuals and structures is to make structures supreme. She labels this approach 'downward conflation', meaning a top-down fusing together of these two essential elements in society.

The second, contrasting stance is that of 'individualism', where social reality consists of nothing more than individuals and their activities. Structures are passive and deferential; agents are 'puppet masters' and their interpretations form reality. Here, power is one way, from bottom to top, and this she labels 'upwards conflation'.

Finally, there is the third way, where agency and structure are fused into one. Neither agency nor structure is dominant, since both are one and the same thing. According to critics of 'structuration' theory, of which Archer is one of the more vocal, this perspective makes the mistake of seeing agency and structure as double-headed and thus, in analytical terms, indivisible. The relationship between the two is an endless cycle of simultaneous transformation. This 'central conflation' results in the compression of these two essential components into a timeless, indistinguishable and flat affair.

Conflation of any kind is misguided, says Archer. What these approaches fail to appreciate is the distinctiveness of social structures and, likewise, of agency. They are separate entities, although not isolated ones. This is one of the central tenets of social realism, to which we now turn.

3.3. Social realism: an extraction of key themes

This section focuses on four main features of realism in order to give a broad understanding of its research philosophy. A more exhaustive summary of Bhaskar's work is to be found in Outhwaite (Outhwaite, 1987) and Collier (Collier, 1994). A detailed treatment of 'the 'morphogenetic approach' appears in Archer's book (Archer, 1995), although the work of Parker is helpful for a comparative perspective (Parker, 2000, chapter 6, pp. 69-85).

3.3.1. *Agency & social structures as separate but inter-dependent*

An essential tenet of social realism is that social structures and human agents are separate concepts and can be analysed as such. Yet, crucially, they are influenced by and can influence each other. Social structures are seen as the relative enduring, intended and unintended consequences of agents' activities. Society is depicted as an endless, sequential and systematic cycle involving an interplay between structures and agency over time and space (Archer, 1982, p. 458, Archer, 1995, p. 15). Archer's two basic propositions are these:

- *Structures pre-date the actions leading to their reproduction or transformation*
- *Structural changes post-date the actions which gave rise to them*

(Archer, 1995, p. 15)

Realists, says Archer, see social structures as *"a complex set of relations between parts"* of society (Archer, 1995, p. 91) and as *"quintessentially relational"* but still 'real' because of their ability to affect agents (Archer, 1995, p. 106). Their influence can be at one of three levels: firstly, at the positional, meaning the relatively privileged or under-privileged position of individuals in society; secondly, at the level of roles, as teacher or student, doctor or patient, and entailing differential access to resources; and thirdly, at the institutional level, such as the legal, religious and financial obligations which apply to marriage and divorce (Archer, 2000, p. 468).

Agency, meanwhile, is used by Archer to mean 'people'. Social realism starts from the premise that social agents are *"reflective, purposive, promotive and innovative"* (Archer, 1995, p. 249). However, there are limits to their influence, caused by structural and cultural restraints which may be beyond their knowledge or experience.

Although distinctive, these two entities are capable of transforming each other over time. They *"can be both cause and caused"* (Parker, 2000, p. 75). Thus, the term 'morphogenesis', which Archer

borrowed from Walter Buckley⁵ to describe the profound and unpredictable mutations which are possible in society. Archer distances herself from a 'systems' perspective, though, since this process is quite unlike a mechanism, organism or any other system, since there is no equilibrium or perfect state.

"Our open society is like itself and nothing else, precisely because it is both structured and peopled."

(Archer, 1995, p. 75)

This portrays the uniqueness of social systems, and the complex relationship between its people and parts.

3.3.2. The relationship between agency and social structure

The linking system or medium for these transformations, or morphogenesis, is the emergent property. Both agents and structures possess emergent properties, which have the potential (real and unexercised, conscious and unconscious) to influence each other. They occupy and operate over "different tracts of the time dimension" and this means that, potentially, they can be out of sync with one another in time (Archer, 1995, p. 66). This is reminiscent of the *Ageing and Society Paradigm* formulated by Matilda White Riley and others as a conceptual device which illuminates "...the place of age in both lives (as people age) and the surrounding social structures" (Riley et al., 1999, p. 327). Central to the Ageing and Society framework is the idea that "against the backdrop of history, changes in people's lives influence and are influenced by changes in social structures and institutions" (Riley et al., 1999, p. 327). These two dynamic processes - of changing lives and changing structures - are seen as inter-dependent and often disharmonious. Lives and structures rarely fit neatly together and it is this tension which produces change.

⁵ Archer says the term was first used by Walter Buckley in his book "Sociology and Modern Systems Theory", Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1967, to refer "to those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state", p. 58, see: (Archer, 1995, footnote 11, p. 75).

Returning to the writings of Archer, it follows that there is a history to every state and each transformation: a before, middle and after. An example would be the casual labour market, which pre-dates the arrival of new cohorts of freelance workers. Yet we would have to recognise the influence, firstly, of previous cohorts of freelancers on the current shape or constitution of casual labour and, secondly, of current cohorts, who are also influencing and possibly transforming the process.

Time, then, is an essential dimension in Archer's version of social realism (as it is in the *Ageing and Society Paradigm*). The process creates a temporal break between people and their practices, as Bhaskar describes:

"... people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so."

(Bhaskar, 1979, p.45)

Archer depicts the process of transformation as a three-part cycle involving:

1. *Structural conditioning, where properties are seen as the emergent or aggregate consequences of past actions; thus they shape the situations in which later generations find themselves and influence the social distribution of resources inherited by agents;*
2. *Social interaction, affected by the social positions of agents, their vested interests, creative endeavours and capacity to innovate in the face of constraints; and*
3. *Structural elaboration, largely resulting in unintended consequences and involving modifications to previous structural properties. [This is where Riley and Archer depart from each other. Riley sees agents as pushing for, and eventually gaining, the kind of social structures which they want or need (Riley et al., 1994, p. 340). For Archer, outcomes are often neither sought after nor wanted due to concessions and conflict between various parties (Archer, 1995, p. 91).]*

The way in which structures, practices and conventions might be beyond the knowledge, awareness or intentions of individuals is made explicit in Bhaskar's work:

"The conception I am proposing is that people, in their conscious activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (and occasionally transform) the structures governing their substantive activities of production. Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear family or work to sustain the capitalist economy. Yet it is nevertheless the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also a necessary condition for, their activity. Moreover, when social forms change, the explanation will not normally lie in the desires of agents to change them that way, though as a very important theoretical and political limit it may do so. I want to distinguish sharply, then, between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions and plans of people, on the one hand, and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities on the other..."

(Bhaskar, 1979, p. 44-45)

In the case of freelancers, say, their need to compete for assignments on an individual level might undermine collective agreements and weaken rights to pay levels and benefits. Older freelancers might have to accept fees that devalue their experience, weakening their hold on the labour market.

3.3.3. The stratified nature of social reality

A third basic canon of Archer's social realism is the acceptance that individuals and groups have different resources upon which to draw. This improves or weakens their bargaining position, and thus their ability to influence and transform their circumstances. Resources are seen in relative terms, as being more or less valuable to certain people or collectives rather than others at certain times. There are no absolutes. Instead, negotiating strength lies in the comparative resources which are brought to the 'exchange' and the ability of one party to possess valuable resources which are needed by the other. Thus, age may be a significant factor in explaining chances of survival in the flexible labour market.

The way in which structures, practices and conventions might be beyond the knowledge, awareness or intentions of individuals is made explicit in Bhaskar's work:

"The conception I am proposing is that people, in their conscious activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (and occasionally transform) the structures governing their substantive activities of production. Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear family or work to sustain the capitalist economy. Yet it is nevertheless the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also a necessary condition for, their activity. Moreover, when social forms change, the explanation will not normally lie in the desires of agents to change them that way, though as a very important theoretical and political limit it may do so. I want to distinguish sharply, then, between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions and plans of people, on the one hand, and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities on the other..."

(Bhaskar, 1979, p. 44-45)

In the case of freelancers, say, their need to compete for assignments on an individual level might undermine collective agreements and weaken rights to pay levels and benefits. Older freelancers might have to accept fees that devalue their experience, weakening their hold on the labour market.

3.3.3. The stratified nature of social reality

A third basic canon of Archer's social realism is the acceptance that individuals and groups have different resources upon which to draw. This improves or weakens their bargaining position, and thus their ability to influence and transform their circumstances. Resources are seen in relative terms, as being more or less valuable to certain people or collectives rather than others at certain times. There are no absolutes. Instead, negotiating strength lies in the comparative resources which are brought to the 'exchange' and the ability of one party to possess valuable resources which are needed by the other. Thus, age may be a significant factor in explaining chances of survival in the flexible labour market.

This brings us to the final aim of this section, to examine the emancipatory potential which is less obvious in Archer's vision of social realism, but bold and explicit in Bhaskar's, and in the writings of other authors who have elaborated on his work.

3.4. Realism as a 'critical' endeavour

Bhaskar sees emancipation as the ultimate pursuit of research in the social sciences (Bhaskar, 1986, Bhaskar, 1989). By this, he means that by uncovering knowledge about the human condition, we can expose its essence and allow those affected subjects to do something about it. To be free, according to the critical realist, is:

"... to know and to possess the power and disposition to act in or towards our real individual, social, species and natural interests."

(Bhaskar, 1989, p. 187)

Without such ambitions, social science research is depicted by critical realists as sterile, inward-looking and unchallenging. Andrew Sayer says that, as critical social scientists, we are charged with the responsibility for exposing false beliefs, identifying unmet needs, explaining the causes, judging sources of oppression and illusion and offering or favouring certain solutions over others (Sayer, 2000). This "*quest for the good*" is open to interpretation, but nevertheless we weaken our research undertakings if we fail to offer or at least question the possibility of viable alternatives (Sayer, 2000, p. 161).

A critical perspective emphasises the culturally specific processes and practices operating within society. This can help us to question, as Alvesson and Willmott do, the legitimacy of management theory, the motives of management gurus, the role of managers in organisations and the power of individuals in the workplace (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Of particular note is Alvesson and Willmott's belief that modern Western societies have encouraged an ideology of individualism, where success is a measure of the extent of our sovereignty and self-determination. Critical

theorists attempt to shift the focal point to the socially generated and reproduced structures underlying such ideologies.

Critical gerontologists, meanwhile, seek *"to unmask conflicts and contradictions"* which surround the experience of ageing (Moody, 1993). This allows us to question the rules, conventions, incentives and policies which apply to retirement and to other age-specific structures and to investigate patterns of domination and manipulation (Atchley, 1993).

3.5. Overview

To summarise, the philosophical framework provided by Roy Bhaskar, and pursued by Margaret Archer in 'the morphogenetic approach', offers a highly promising, as well as challenging, point of departure for this study. Although not without its critics⁶, it is a view of the social world which has particular strengths in helping us to make sense of the relationship between individuals and social structures and so design a study which can explore and comprehend the forces at work. Social realism recognises the powerful influence which individuals exert under certain conditions and at certain times. This accords with the *"purposive agents"* and *"vastly skilled"* individuals which Anthony Giddens envisages in his structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, p. 3 & p. 26, resp.). But, unlike structuration theory, or other 'central conflationary' approaches, individuals are seen by social and critical realists as analytically separate from the social structures which affect, and are affected by, them. We, as agents, are never entirely divorced from the wider socio-cultural system in which we exist, yet we are distinct entities, rather than two simultaneous happenings. Archer gives the example of the exchanges between teachers and pupils which take place in the classroom, but also within educational systems. We must appreciate the wider context in which social interaction takes place. As a consequence, Archer's treatment offers scope for the social scientist, as Parker explains:

"Neither oppressive structural constraint, where conditioning seems like determination and actors are caught in the embrace of fully integrated systems, nor the self-determination of

⁶ For a general critique of realism, see (Layder, 1990); for a critique of Archer's 'morphogenetic approach', see (King, 1999).

well-resourced, talented, politically-emancipated individuals working the structures to their advantage, are ruled out. Contingency, the contradictoriness and hence openness of structures, and the skills, imagination and effort of individuals (and hence the openness of agency) all have a bearing on emergent outcomes..."

(Parker, 2000, p. 74)

The emergent properties intrinsic to 'the morphogenetic approach' acknowledge the way people and structures will be transformed over time. This is an important consideration for a study of ageing and social change, where three separate temporal processes are taking place:

1. the ageing of individuals, each with their own employment histories and individual work trajectories;
2. the passage of separate cohorts through the years, each sharing their experience of particular demographic compositions, economic cycles and industrial change;
3. the influence of the era or decade, bringing with it new or modified forms of employment, technology and social welfare policies and practices.

Although a cross-sectional study can barely begin to document or understand these three parallel influences, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge their presence, even if their impact is difficult for the single researcher or research participant to detect.

Another important strand which Archer develops is the unequal access to resources which can be compounded over time. Although age is not mentioned specifically, her reference to gender, disability and ethnicity suggests a recognition of the importance of sources of social inequality in the allocation of resources. Here we are reminded of the influence of social capital on life chances, explored by James Coleman and seen as including networking, skills, capabilities and other social resources which help people to realise their interests (Coleman, 1994, chapter 12). Such ideas are also captured by Randall Collins in his theory of interaction rituals (Turner and Collins, 1989). Here, cultural capital (specialist knowledge, reputation and network position) is seen as a powerful indicator of success in exchange relationships. However, Archer steers clear of the functional overtones of their work, by resisting any notion of equilibrium or balance in the way society resolves these competing forces.

Finally, we are provided with a framework which may help us examine, and possibly expose, the illusions, myths and paradoxes which might emerge in a study of older workers and flexible labour. In fact, we are urged to cast a critical gaze and to seek out false beliefs, as well as to suggest amendments and corrections to the state of play. To paraphrase Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 1979), it is not enough to judge our present condition. We also need to comprehend, illuminate and expose.

3.6. The pursuit of knowledge

We must now turn from ontology – our view of the social world – to epistemology – our theory of knowledge. How does the realist understand and pursue knowledge? Realism believes that we can establish a fund of knowledge about society which is independent of our thoughts about it. In other words, researchers make sense of the social world, but do not construct it. Our findings are not academic artifices – generally speaking – but based on reality. This is distinct from saying there are universal truths, which realism refutes. However, it believes that attempts to know the social world are worthwhile and legitimate. Although difficult and messy, the research process can uncover aspects of society, albeit partial ones which may be amended later on. These aspects are in no sense the ultimate or absolute truth, but, in contrast to the post-modernist position, endure independently of our knowledge and experience of them (Outhwaite, 1987). As Sayer says:

"... notwithstanding the daunting complexity of the world and the fallible and situated character of knowledge, it is possible to develop reliable knowledge and for there to be progress in understanding."

(Sayer, 2000, p. 30)

People may have an understanding or *"some discursive penetration"* (Archer, 2000, p. 469) about their world but this does not mean it is accurate or complete.

"Thus to realists, knowledge about a state of affairs can never be taken for that state of affairs."

(Archer, 2000, p. 470)

To confuse knowledge about reality with how reality is means committing the 'epistemic fallacy', says Archer ⁷.

Benton and Craib see a further distinguishing feature of the realist's view of knowledge (Benton and Craib, 2001). This is that it shares with other contemporary philosophies a 'reflexivity' about the way knowledge is acquired. By this, they mean that knowledge is a social process involving differing 'means of representation' (Benton and Craib, 2001, p. 120). In addition, the authors see a role for analogy and metaphor in order to aid understanding and explanations about facets of society. Thus the realist recognises that his or her pursuit of knowledge is a social practice ending in a historically situated social product (Benton and Craib, 2001, p. 130).

3.7. Implications

The adoption of a critical/social realist framework has important consequences for my methodology. The next chapter will describe the methods in detail. For the present, let me highlight four key features of the methodology. Firstly, I concentrated on three sub-sectors of the media industry in the UK. Freelance employment is located, then, in one employment context, in a particular geographical area and over the time period of the research, from 1998 to 2001.

Secondly, I used qualitative research methods to gather and analyse 'knowledge'. I interviewed a broad variety of research participants face-to-face; I used 'theoretical' or 'purpose' sampling in order to reflect a diverse set of experiences; and I relied on data analysis techniques rooted in a 'grounded' approach. Freelance employment is seen, then, through the understandings, interpretations and experiences of individuals.

Thirdly, the research strategy was flexible, responsive and 'reflexive'. The research evolved in a circular fashion, with each component feeding into the next. Literature reviews, research questions, in-depth interviews and data analysis informed each other and, in turn, modified the research design. There was a gravitational pull towards a completed research project but, nevertheless, the

⁷ For an explanation and discussion of the 'epistemic fallacy', see (Collier, 1994, pages 76-78).

process was not linear or fixed. This accorded well with the fluid and ever-changing nature of freelance employment.

Finally, the methodology recognised the influence of the researcher in identifying the locus of interest, the style of research design and the interpretations of findings. The researcher's background in the media industry, knowledge of working conditions and interest in the position of older people in the labour market was an important influence, although its precise effect is hard to measure.

These four features are in sympathy with the realist's ontology and epistemology. The prime aim of the project was to understand and explain the experiences of older freelancers, whilst recognising the influence of social structures. The research design acknowledged the partial accounts, the importance of context and the 'voice' of the researcher in shaping the overall framework. Yet the reflexive style also allowed an empathetic design which was responsive to the process under scrutiny.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH METHODS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is the story of the research process: the why, what, how and where of the study. It seeks to explain the origins of the project, the research tools and analytical devices. It does so using a chronological narrative. The research had a clear beginning and end. Although there were deviations, there was a basic progression which this chapter tries to convey. Where necessary, the narrative is supplemented by references, examples and charts. Issues which concerned me throughout the research, such as ethical matters on confidentiality, are also raised at appropriate points.

This research story is unique. No other research project has examined the same issues in the same way. And yet it is also a rather familiar tale. By drawing on the work of Mason (1996) and Janesick (2000), we see that it has five overarching principles, each typical of qualitative research (Mason, 1996, p. 4-6, Janesick, 2000, p. 385-6):

1. Qualitative designs are grounded in a research philosophy open to the experiences, meanings and interpretations of individuals. The researcher aims to examine relationships within a complex and multi-layered social world. The emphasis is on comprehending the social setting rather than making predictions, charting surface patterns or proving something about those settings.
2. Qualitative enquiries are flexible and sensitive to the research setting. The qualitative researcher needs to be reflexive about methods, capable of self-examination and of adapting to changing research conditions. Methods are thorough and rigorous but never rigid or standardised.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH METHODS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is the story of the research process: the why, what, how and where of the study. It seeks to explain the origins of the project, the research tools and analytical devices. It does so using a chronological narrative. The research had a clear beginning and end. Although there were deviations, there was a basic progression which this chapter tries to convey. Where necessary, the narrative is supplemented by references, examples and charts. Issues which concerned me throughout the research, such as ethical matters on confidentiality, are also raised at appropriate points.

This research story is unique. No other research project has examined the same issues in the same way. And yet it is also a rather familiar tale. By drawing on the work of Mason (1996) and Janesick (2000), we see that it has five overarching principles, each typical of qualitative research (Mason, 1996, p. 4-6, Janesick, 2000, p. 385-6):

1. Qualitative designs are grounded in a research philosophy open to the experiences, meanings and interpretations of individuals. The researcher aims to examine relationships within a complex and multi-layered social world. The emphasis is on comprehending the social setting rather than making predictions, charting surface patterns or proving something about those settings.
2. Qualitative enquiries are flexible and sensitive to the research setting. The qualitative researcher needs to be reflexive about methods, capable of self-examination and of adapting to changing research conditions. Methods are thorough and rigorous but never rigid or standardised.

3. Qualitative research uses methods of analysis and explanation building appropriate to detailed and contextual data in order to produce rounded understandings. There is ongoing analysis of the data, often equal to the time spent in the research setting.
4. In qualitative studies, the researcher as observer and/or interviewer is the primary research instrument. The way s/he integrates him or herself into the research setting and carries out face-to-face interviews will have important consequences for the quality of the data.
5. Qualitative designs give a 'voice' to the researcher so that s/he can describe the influences that shaped their decisions, interests and intentions in the research process.

These principles underlie the research strategy and execution detailed in this chapter. The story begins, though, by focusing on the researcher's 'voice' – the last of the principles listed above. The researcher's background, preferences and institutional position can be, and in this case were, at the forefront of the design of a project. Coffey has been highly critical of the way researchers edit themselves out of the finished research product, or relegate themselves to an appendix or sub-section (Coffey, 1999). Their part in the instigation of the research, the formulation of the intellectual puzzle and the methods deployed to answer the research questions are seen as critical, and therefore in need of open and candid documentation (Watson, 1994b, Miles and Huberman, 1994, Denzin, 1994, p. 501).

A brief examination of my professional background helps to explain the genesis of the research project and to indicate possible sources of bias. It is placed at the beginning of the chapter since my 'intellectual baggage' was a formative influence at the start of the project. Especially relevant is my lengthy experience as a journalist and programme maker in newspapers and television, and my research study into employment patterns among older workers at the BBC which preceded this current research.

The chapter continues by justifying the study's location in the media industry. There is also reason for caution in selecting the media, largely due to its shifting and fluid boundaries. Case study methodology suggests we should strive for completeness, a difficult concept to apply to diverse

phenomena. Here, as later on in the chapter, there is an example of pure methods being adapted to suit the practical demands of the field. I interpret case study best practice in a certain way, in order to manage the constraints of the subject matter.

The study relies on in-depth, face-to-face interviews as a main source of data. The value of such interviews is discussed, as well as concerns over the detached and partial nature of such encounters. The location of my interviews became an important dimension of the fieldwork. Few meetings took place at workstations or in the individual's own office. Despite or perhaps because of this, and due to the promise of anonymity for participants, interviews provided a rich and valuable source of insights.

Locating the study group involved a complex and exhausting process of 'snowballing' and quotas. The strategy for locating individual cases is described, as well as the underlying principles. Decisions over who to interview were based on a reflexive strategy - part pragmatic and part strategic. This interplay of careful planning and practical constraint is a feature of most elements of the methodology, but is particularly apparent in the construction of the study group.

A number of research instruments became critical to the collection and analysis of data, notably digital technology - in the form of MiniDisc recorders - and computer technology - in the shape of database and analytical software packages. My MiniDisc recorder became an indispensable tool for the many interviews in public places, such as bars and restaurants. Microsoft Access, the database software programme, was a highly effective planning and storage system during fieldwork and in the writing of thesis drafts. Finally, the code-based theory-building package Atlas.ti was an important support system for data analysis. The principles underlying my 'grounded' methodology are discussed in some detail, as well as the Atlas.ti tools which supported the analytical process. Again, there are examples here of methods being adapted to suit the constraints and needs of the research.

An example is given of the research process in operation, by focusing on the importance of one particular metaphor used by a research participant in an early interview. This serves to illustrate many other aspects of the analytical process. Finally, the chapter ends by discussing four main problems in the methodology: the difficulty in gaining clarity; the disadvantages of relying on lay

concepts for theory building; the inward-looking nature of a 'grounded' approach; and the difficulty in validating findings.

4.2. The researcher's voice

The aim of this section is not to give a detailed personal biography, nor a protracted self-confessional. Rather, I wish to explain the connections between my professional background and the genesis of this research project. This research is located in the media industry, a sector in which I was employed for 15 years. The subject matter is age and employment, an interest which developed during studies for a Masters degree at the Institute of Gerontology, King's College London. Both need to be raised if I wish to mount an honest and open account of the research process.

4.2.1. My professional background and interests

My experience in the media industry stretches across one and a half decades, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, and across a number of sub-sectors, from weekly and national newspapers, to networked television and radio broadcasting. I was employed as a full-time member of staff and as a short-term casual in a number of roles, including as a journalist, researcher, assistant producer and policy adviser. I worked in various parts of the UK, as well as in the United States. In so doing, I witnessed the introduction of new technology, the reconfiguration of media organisations and sub-sectors, the growth of new forms of media, the increasing casualisation of the industry and the growing concern among major employers about diversity issues among staff and output. Although gender, race and disability tended to take precedence, there was a recognition in some quarters that age might be an issue in terms of employment opportunities and programme representation. A formative article, published in the BBC's weekly in-house magazine whilst I was employed by its Policy and Planning Unit, highlighted the ageism which appeared to thrive within the Corporation (Purcell, 1990). Three years later, one of the BBC's equality newsletters questioned the loss of so many of its staff aged 50 plus (Hickman, 1993). The seeds were sown for a Masters dissertation which was to bring together, rather incredibly I thought at the time, my interest in gerontology, my knowledge of the BBC (having worked there for several years by then), and my need to complete a 10,000 word dissertation for my MSc in Gerontology.

As I acknowledged then (Platman, 1995, p. 3), it was to the BBC's credit that such a public institution was prepared to grant me access to its private records. The findings - based on a retrospective analysis of 15 years of personnel records - told a stark tale of the growing exodus of its oldest staff, tempted by early retirement and redundancy packages (Platman and Tinker, 1998). Among the puzzles which remained, however, was the destination of these older workers. There was anecdotal evidence at the time of the research in the early 1990s that a proportion were taking financial incentives and then setting themselves up as freelancers. I wondered how difficult such an undertaking would be and for how long it would remain attractive and viable. And so it was that one project had led to the next.

A major concern, however, was over the funding for the research and the best academic setting. The subject matter appeared to cut across a number of different disciplines in the social sciences. As my eclectic reading was to prove later on, I had interests in, among others, ageing, retirement, paid work, careers and management, creating uncertainty over whether I should position myself in a department of sociology, gerontology, social policy or management. The choice of the Open University Business School was, in many ways, an ideal one. It guaranteed funding for three years; it permitted remote working so that I could remain in London; and it exposed me to the interests of two supervisors with complementary backgrounds, one in older workers and the other in human resource management.

4.3. The media industry as a case study

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that I should locate the study in the media industry. I had worked on local and national newspapers, and in public and commercial broadcasting, for a number of years. I had personal experience of the technological, organisational and structural changes which had affected working conditions since the late 1970s. I had contacts in a range of organisations.

There were more compelling reasons for the choice, though. The media industry represented an unusual and significant location in which to study freelancing in later life. Firstly, freelancing had been common in parts of the media industry for many decades: self-help advice was available for freelance journalists as early as 1928 (Hyde, 1928). Flexible employment had grown rapidly since

the mid-1980s, as organisations out-sourced services and casualised positions in order, firstly, to offer cost-effective and competitive services and, secondly, to cope with rapid industrial and regulatory change. A tradition of freelance working, coupled with its rapid expansion, meant a potential pool of diverse participants for the study.

Secondly, parts of the media industry were expanding rapidly. The UK Government had noted the strategic and economic value of the creative (including media) industries to the UK economy (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 1998). Official mapping exercises, such as those by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, revealed the diversity of media operations, output, profitability and occupations. This would further enhance the heterogeneity of the study group.

Thirdly, in common with a number of other UK industries, the larger media employers had presided over rapid staff reductions from the 1980s on. The introduction and enhancement of redundancy and early retirement packages had led to a substantial exodus of older workers from permanent, full-time, in-house media employment (Platman and Tinker, 1998). This suggested the existence of a pool of older flexible labour operating in the industry.

Fourthly, a growing number of researchers were undertaking studies of the media industry's employment practices. Published reports, journal articles and conference papers on the television sector, newspaper, magazine and book publishing and, to a lesser extent, new media provided a valuable over-view of working conditions. In a number of instances, the research was concerned primarily with freelance working. As a whole, this represented a substantial body of material which could inform my study.

Finally, the media dealt largely with creative and information services and products. Its organisations appeared to display many of the hallmarks of the 'network enterprise' (Castells, 1996) in their blurred boundaries, global spread and reliance on digital technology. Other futuristic models (such as the knowledge economy, the information society, the wired world and the e-lance economy) saw an expanding role for media enterprises. For instance, in Reich's book on the fundamental re-structuring of the economy in the 21st century, the highly-educated, problem-solving 'symbolic analyst' was pivotal to the needs of the newly configured corporation (Reich, 1991). Individuals who could identify, solve and strategically manage organisational problems were at a

premium. The symbolic analyst traded in data, words, visual images and ideas. S/he was the scientist, engineer, management consultant, but also the art director, film editor, production designer, publisher, writer, editor, journalist and television producer.

Castells' thesis on the Network Society (Castells, 1996) predicted that the economy of the future would centre on information, communication and micro-electronic-based structures. The unit of production would be the business project rather than the firm. This project-driven economy would lead to widespread networks, alliances and partnerships typical of media employment practices (Castells, 2000, p. 11)¹. Likewise, Malone and Laubacher saw an increasing role for independent, electronically-connected freelancers in their futuristic model of the 'E-Lance Economy' (Malone and Laubacher, 1998).

On the other hand, there were reasons for caution in settling for the media industry. The media industry appeared to be 'boundaryless', to borrow the term from Arthur and Rousseau's study of organisational careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Definitions of the media industry were inadequate and variable; its boundaries were poorly drawn. How could I conduct a case study where the case was indeterminate and ever-changing? Media enterprises appeared to be reconfiguring with alarming frequency.

In addition, my prior knowledge as a media employee might prove an impediment to an open and unbiased investigation. My contacts may have been partial, narrow and constraining. My view of freelance employment conditions might have been tarnished by my own experience in the industry.

How, then, did I address these concerns? As this chapter will go on to explain, I used three main devices. Firstly, I adapted case study methodology to overcome the problems of fluid industry

¹ A similar, although more career-specific, vision was proposed by Miles and Snow in their analysis of the role of networked enterprises in the 21st century (Miles and Snow, 1996). Another source is worth citing here. In a UK Government report on the implications of 'the knowledge driven economy', two futuristic scenarios are suggested (Department of Trade and Industry, 1999). In one, that of the 'Wired World', work is increasingly dominated by self-employment and portfolio working. The US film industry is offered as an example of an early adopter of such practices.

boundaries; secondly, I recruited a broad-based and diverse study group from a range of sub-sectors, some parts of which lay outside my direct expertise; and thirdly, I adopted a reflexive, self-critical stance to the sampling framework and the interpretation of findings.

4.4. Adapting case study methodology

Yin believes that one of the key features of an exemplary case study is its “*sense of completeness*” (Yin, 1984, p. 141). The researcher must demonstrate that s/he has reached the boundaries of the case, by exploring its “*analytic periphery*” (p. 141) as well as its core, and that all the critical pieces of evidence have been collected. This idea of the case as a complete and closed entity is also presumed by Stake (Stake, 2000). For him, the case is “*a specific One*” (p. 436), and a functioning system with working parts. Both these depictions posed a dilemma for my research. Which particular ‘One’ should I attend to in the media industry?

The media industry has a unique social and industrial history (Stokes and Reading, 1999) and it is a significant place in which to study older freelancers. But was I to abandon the site because it was neither uniform, self-contained nor static? If clear boundaries did not exist in the media industry, how could I pretend otherwise? It may have been possible to find one small, discrete media entity in which the borders were more visible, but this would have narrowed the scope of my enquiries, restricted the diversity of the study group and compromised the research aims. A more productive pursuit was to adapt case study methodology to the practical realities of researching a fluid industry like the media and a mobile freelance population such as freelancers.

Stake gives us a clue as to how we might solve the problem (Stake, 2000). Where we are interested in a general phenomenon, he says, we may wish to select a population of cases, rather than one individual case. Instead of seeing the media industry as ‘the case’, I could view each of my research participants as one of a number of individual cases. Returning to Yin’s exemplary standard, I could reach the periphery of each case by exploring the underlying as well as surface tensions, the outer as well as inner beliefs and practices, among each individual. I would have exhausted each case - or reached its periphery - when I felt I had gained a full understanding of their position, had checked out discontinuities in their views and had probed the relevant strands of their case. The end product would be a composite view of freelancing, which would allow room for

deviant or exceptional cases and for a comparison of the diverse situations, backgrounds and views.

4.5. Interviews

I felt the best way of achieving this “*sense of completeness*” among each of my individual cases was to use face-to-face, in-depth interviews. This method would allow me to concentrate on...

- Understandings and interpretations
- Views and experiences
- Stories and anecdotes
- Attitudes and perceptions

...of freelance working. By this means, I could gain access to complex and fragmented narratives about a volatile employment state.

Kvale defines the qualitative research interview as, “*a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge*” (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). The interviewer tries to comprehend the world from the subjects’ point of view, he says, by uncovering meanings and lived experiences.

Such a research method had advantages over other forms of data gathering such as questionnaires or observation. The length, location and content of the interview could be tailor-made to suit each research participant. Interview schedules could be designed as broad and flexible guides, leaving the conversation to deviate according to the concerns and interests of the interviewee. If certain themes or experiences appeared important, they could be pursued at length and revisited at different points during the meeting. I could re-jig the interview schedule in an instant if certain lines of enquiry were inappropriate or unproductive. (See Appendix 03 for the interview schedules.) I could look to the past as well as the future, by pursuing the narratives of certain incidents as they arose in the conversation.

Each research encounter could be treated as a puzzle to be jointly solved by myself and the interviewee, “*a co-production*”, to use Wengraf’s term (Wengraf, 2001, p. 3). Both parties could

examine why freelancing was managed in one way rather than another, why individuals behaved as they did, why rates of pay were set as they were. I could come to each interview knowing very little about the individual and emerge, at the end, with a far clearer understanding of their motives, ambitions and frustrations. The lack of advance information meant that each interview involved a genuine exploration of the issues of pertinence to that individual.

At a more practical level, the wording and ordering of the questions could be adapted to fit the amount of time an interviewee could give. The interview preamble was a good way to establish a rapport with the interviewee and to explain further the aims of the research. The interview could include informal exchanges which may have appeared irrelevant to the research but which were important in generating goodwill and co-operation. Often the exchanges which led up to and followed the formal interview were revealing in themselves. On several occasions, informal chats with individual freelancers on the way to or from interview locations elicited a great amount of information about styles of operation, individual circumstances and outside interests. These were helpful in constructing a fuller understanding of the 'case' under examination.

However, it is important to acknowledge that interviews as research instruments have their limitations. Two are seen of particular relevance to this study: firstly, the bounded nature of interviews; and secondly, the reconstructed nature of interview responses.

4.5.1. Interview boundaries

The first limitation became apparent to me at a relatively late stage in the fieldwork. I had completed a lengthy interview with a successful older freelancer at his home. Despite his lengthy experience freelancing over more than two decades, he said he remained puzzled as to how he found work. If a freelancer as long-established as he had trouble understanding the peculiarities of a freelance life, how was I to gain a complete picture of the process from others? I began to wonder whether I needed to supplement interviews with other kinds of data gathering, such as observation. At this point, I had completed more than 20 of the interviews with freelancers. Yet I felt detached from the day-to-day realities of a freelancer's life. Although in-depth interviews were an effective instrument for allowing individuals to describe and recount their freelance experiences, it was not the same thing as actually witnessing it for myself. But how could I observe a process as

individualistic and relatively hidden as freelancing? By and large, freelancing tended to be a rather private undertaking. In the case of this particular freelancer, his work tended to take place at his own work station, on computer and in his head. His schedules were hectic and meetings rare or usually brief. The presence of an observer might hinder the swift and genial encounters necessary for freelancers to carry out their activities and, in addition, fail to capture the processes I wished to understand.

The problem of detachment was compounded by the location of most of the interviews. Interviewees were asked to suggest the location which best suited them, whether in their own home, an office or other meeting place. As Figure 4.1 below shows, a popular option, suggested by 13 individuals, was a bar, café or restaurant. Meeting rooms were selected by 12 people, and 17 people chose a domestic setting, such as their own or my kitchen or lounge. Only in a minority of cases - 9 in all - did the research encounter take place at their own workstation or office.

Figure 4.1. Location of first interviews with research participants				
	<i>Individual freelancers</i>	<i>Key Informants</i>	<i>Employers</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Workstation or own office</i>	2	6	1	9
<i>Meeting room at office premises</i>	5	3	4	12
<i>Bar, café or restaurant</i>	6	4	3	13
<i>Lounge or kitchen of participant or researcher</i>	16	0	1	17
Total	29	13	9	51

This was an unsurprising feature of the research interviews, perhaps, given the constant interruptions, distractions and lack of privacy which pervaded most work settings. Workers felt it necessary to get away from their desks, find a neutral setting and put their daily pressures to one side. This was true not only of individual freelancers, only two of whom chose their work rooms for the interviews, but of employers as well. Only one employer, the creative director of a design agency, chose to invite me into his own personal office. It endowed freelancing with an intriguing and invisible quality. Where did it take place? What did it look like? How was it done?

As intriguing as this was, the research was too far advanced to redesign the entire research project. Even if there had been time to build an ethnographic dimension into the research, questions remained over how this could be done and how productive it would be.

4.5.2. Interviews as re-constructions

The second limitation of interviews has been documented by a number of authors including Kvale, quoted above. In describing the qualitative interview as “a construction site of knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, p. 125), Kvale accepts its partial nature. It is neither pure nor neutral, but a subjective account influenced by the interviewer, the setting and the research agenda. Atkinson and Silverman warn the researcher against viewing the self-revelatory interview as more authentic or ‘real’ than other data collection methods (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). Interview responses are creative activities, artfully constructed and ‘pre-recorded’.

“The narratives and anecdotes – for all their apparent power to reveal uniquely the interiority of the self – are rehearsed and reproduced. Whether the interviewer be a talk show host inviting confidences from a celebrity, an Oprah Winfrey soliciting personal testimony that can be shared with the audience, or a researcher interrogating an informant, the responses are always likely to be couched in an idiom that reflects prior narration. The self is rehearsed. The spontaneous revelations of the interview culture reflect the repetition of mythic discourse, then, rather than the privileged flash of insight never before witnessed or recounted. The storied self of the interview society is shaped by the possibility – even when not by the actuality – of multiple tellings.”

(Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, p. 314)

As a result, such interviews must be viewed critically, and not as sources of data which are “uniquely privileged” or as “the authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, p. 304 & 305, resp.). We must beware of familiar tales which conform to a cultural script and narrations whose primary purpose is to give credence to the teller rather than to shed light on the subject of inquiry. According to Ochberg, the act of story-telling is an attempt to convince others as well as ourselves of the coherence and order in our lives.

"...the stories that people tell are one way of reclaiming some measure of agency. No matter how buffeted one has been by events, at least one can take charge of how the story is told and, in this way, rescue oneself from passivity."

(Ochberg, 1996, p. 98)

It was important, then, to set one version of reality against the next, pit one individual case against another and analyse the views of the differing players as a rounded whole. The aim was to construct a composite picture of the freelance employment relationship by relying on many, contrasting versions. The precise way this was achieved is documented later in this chapter. For the moment, it is worth mentioning the way the stories told by freelancers were set against each other and against those told by employers and key informants. Each individual case was felt to be unique but, at the same time, a yardstick by which others could be measured. No one freelance experience was regarded as the most truthful, the most common or the most enlightening. Each, in their differing ways, helped to build a broader understanding of freelance employment in the media industry

4.6. Anonymity for interviewees

It was also seen as important to guarantee anonymity to interviewees². This meant, in theory at least, that individuals were free to discuss sensitive issues and divulge details without fear of retribution. It was hoped that this confidentiality would allow respondents to talk frankly about the problems, constraints and barriers that they encountered, without losing face with colleagues, friends, family, customers or clients. If interviewees felt they had to play a particular 'part' or observe a certain 'script' during the interviews, then this could only have been for my benefit as the researcher, or because they were sceptical of the degree of anonymity which had been promised. There was no obvious reason why employers would pretend that their experience of the freelance employment relationship was any better or worse than they actually reported it to be. Equally, there was no apparent incentive for employers to say they had designed systems for managing freelance talent which, in reality, did not exist. They would receive neither plaudits nor condemnation for their

² This anonymity was promised verbally, during initial telephone conversations, and in writing via e-mails and letters.

policies and practices, since their companies were unidentifiable as far as the study's output was concerned.

Anonymity for these research participants entailed more than the dropping of names and company affiliations from descriptions of their cases. Freelancers, employers and key informants had vivid stories to retell and distinctive work histories. Any one of them might have identified them to colleagues or associates. This was a relatively small and cohesive set of sub-sectors, where gossip and close liaisons thrived. In order to ensure that individuals were not recognised, quotes and incidents were checked for identifiers. Information was omitted rather than included if it risked compromising the anonymity of individuals who had co-operated in the study. I had considered using pseudonyms for informants, but felt that these names might be confused with people with similar backgrounds who were operating in the industry but had nothing to do with the research. Common names like David and Susan might have helped the reader to see these people as real human beings, but there was always the risk that a David or Susan really existed, with a striking resemblance to the 'anonymous' individual. It was felt safer to dispense with pseudonyms altogether and use occupational descriptions instead. Although some of these were fairly detailed, they were terms shared by scores, if not hundreds, of others in their respective sectors.

4.7. The strategy for selecting the individual cases

If I was to understand the process of freelancing and its viability for those in later life, I needed a sampling strategy which maximised variety among research participants. I wanted to select participants until I understood the process, not until I represented the entire population. This selection strategy - known alternately as 'purposive', 'focused', 'purposeful' or 'theoretical' sampling - conformed to a different theoretical logic (Patton, 1987, Hakim, 1987, Finch and Mason, 1990, Mason, 1996, p. 83). This alternative logic would allow me to gain access to as diverse a group of participants as possible, rather than to a shrunken version of the total freelance population. Hakim defines 'focused sampling' as:

"...the selective study of particular persons, groups, or institutions, or of particular

relationships, processes or interactions that are expected to offer especially illuminating examples...."

(Hakim, 1987, p. 141)

Each participant becomes a "way in" to the process (Finch and Mason, 1990, p. 34). The method was used by Finch and Mason for the interview phase of their study of family obligations (Finch and Mason, 1990). More recently, they used the same approach in their study of kinship and inheritance in England (Finch and Mason, 2000). Their intention was to generate study groups which contained sufficient variety in terms of characteristics and experiences. This strategy has room for 'deviant' cases, and this was a useful concept should I find freelancing practised in unusual or special ways. I could focus on the *"not-yets, the didn't quite-make-its, the not quite respectable, the unremarked..."*, in other words, the less visible who were perhaps neglected by existing research (Everett Hughes, 1984, cited in Becker, 1998, p. 94).

In line with Mason's advice, I used a system of targets or quotas to maximise variety among the individual cases (Mason, 1996) and to remain systematic in my approach. These were amended, expanded and supplemented as the research proceeded. Before detailing this variety, it is important to mention three broad principles which united the group. Firstly, each of the participants was directly involved in freelancing³. Whether as freelancers, managers of freelancers, or key informants closely involved in freelance practices, they each had personal knowledge and direct experience of media freelance working. Excluded from the study group were senior managers or executives who may have set employment policy, but who were not engaged in the day-to-day management of freelancers. Also excluded were those who were no longer engaged in freelance work.

Secondly, none of the informants could be regarded as 'celebrities' or 'stars'. Although some of the freelancers may have been familiar names to their respective audiences, none had a high media profile or employed a personal agent at the time of the interviews. I was wary of interviewing people

³ There was an exception. One woman interviewee was preparing to launch a freelance career at the time of the interview, but shortly afterwards accepted a permanent job.

who had already achieved notoriety in their field. I wanted to concentrate on the more 'ordinary' side of freelancing, since I felt this was more likely to uncover the realities of freelancing for the great majority of individuals.

Thirdly, all of the informants were interviewed in the South East of England. Several individuals lived outside of the region; nevertheless, the study group was overwhelmingly London-based. This was felt justified due to the London and South-East-based nature of the media industry in the UK (Woolf and Holly, 1994, Gill and Dodd, 2000).

The targets listed below apply mainly to the individual freelancers sought for the study. (For key informants and employers, only the targets for media sub-sectors and gender applied.)

- **Age.** I wanted a spread of ages among freelancers, so that the group included those in the early part of their career as well as those who were more experienced. Given the over-riding concern of the study - to examine the experiences of older freelancers - the study group was skewed towards those over 40 years of age.
- **Gender.** I was concerned to have an even number of men and women among individual freelancers, due to the possibility of contrasts in their experiences.
- **Length of time freelancing.** Views and experiences were likely to differ according to how long an individual had been freelancing. The study group included one woman who thought she was on the brink of a freelance career and another who had been freelancing for 30 years. It was also important that novice freelancers were not confined to the youngest age category and, in fact, the group did include older freelancers who were relatively recent arrivals.
- **Media sub-sector.** I wanted a spread of sub-sectors within the industry. One reason was to extend the research group beyond my own experiences of media working. Another was to locate informants in contrasting work environments. Although it was difficult to know exactly how the demand for and supply of freelancers varied between these sectors due to the lack of up-to-date statistical data, I felt their differing histories, employment traditions and technical specialisms provided differing research contexts. These sub-sectors were:

- a) Newspaper, magazine and book publishing
- b) Radio and television broadcasting
- c) New media

- **Professional job titles.** I wanted to include as many kinds of freelance work as possible and the aim was to include a variety of occupations.
- **Complexity of client base.** My main interest was in those freelancers who were working for a number of clients simultaneously or in swift succession. Still, there was an immense spectrum within this and the study group did include those serving a number of clients during one day or week as well as those employed on lengthy, but sole-employer contracts.
- **Family responsibilities.** I wanted to include those with domestic responsibilities as well as those without. The group included those with and without partners, and those with young children and those with grown-up children no longer living at home.
- **Income.** I wanted to interview those freelancers who appeared to be making a good living out of their work as well as those doing less well financially.
- **Attachment to freelancing.** It was important to include individuals with different attachments to freelancing, in other words, those for whom freelancing represented an attractive and comfortable way of working and those who were wishing to end their freelance careers.
- **Union affiliation.** I wanted to interview freelancers who were members of unions and those who were not.

The list grew as sampling advanced. Even though most of the quotas were filled⁴, by the end of the interviewing phases I still felt I had not exhausted the possibilities. Each individual appeared to possess a unique profile of characteristics and experiences. As mentioned in Chapter 6, no two freelancers seemed alike, even among those working in the same sub-sector and with similar job titles. There appeared to be infinite ways in which these attributes could be combined. It is quite

⁴ One group was under-represented in the new media sector: women, especially in the older ages.

possible that more categories than these would have shed further light on the freelance process. Had time permitted, I would have interviewed many more individuals. An additional regret was the limited repeat interviews undertaken, due to resource constraints and the amount of time needed for data analysis, discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

4.8. Locating the study group

Recruiting a diverse study group was a complex undertaking. Among employers, I wanted to interview only those people with direct responsibility for freelance employment. Identifying likely candidates from company literature or web sites was impractical, since they were rarely listed. Where their names did appear, titles like features editor or editorial director gave no hint of their involvement in freelance, as opposed to in-house, staff matters. Such management responsibility could only be deduced by talking to or e-mailing their senior managers, the freelancers who worked for them, or key informants who knew them.

Finding individual freelancers was equally complicated. There was no central data source for, or of, freelancers currently working in the media industry. There were a number of separate, bespoke lists held by media recruitment agencies, trade unions, professional groups and job registers. But these were skewed by various selection criteria, such as an occupational specialism or a monthly or an annual subscription. Trade union density had declined in the media industry. Even if access to paid up trade union members had been secured, a list would not have reached the range I required – which, of course, included those who were non-union members.

I was unconvinced that the most established, experienced and/or oldest freelancers - the group I most wanted to locate - would be using these listing services or registers anyway. If they had become integrated into the industry, they were more likely to be using their own networks for job-hunting.

Locating freelancers via companies was equally problematic. Centrally-held lists of freelancers within organisations were unusual, since the freelance relationship tended to operate at a local, commissioning level. Even if such lists existed, the volatile nature of freelancing would have made

them out of date within a short space of time. Further, such lists would have been organisation-specific and too narrow for my needs.

Informal networking appeared to be a more satisfactory route to my study group. Not only could I target informants from multiple backgrounds, organisations and sub-sectors, but I could achieve this by conforming to the conventions of the industry. Studies of freelance working confirmed the importance of informal networks for matching freelancers to assignments in the film industry (Jones, 1996, DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, Blair, 2001), in television (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999, Willis and Dex, 1999) and in new media (Gill and Dodd, 2000).

Approaching individuals informally and asking for their recommendations, as well as for general advice about the research, was an unremarkable way to proceed. I could access a hard-to-reach study population whilst fitting in with the prevailing culture of the industry.

The common term for such a sampling technique is 'snowballing', where, *"One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on."* (Vogt, 1999, p. 268).

The technique is seen as a valuable research tool for sampling isolated or impenetrable social groupings (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). Social and professional networks can provide *"an ever-expanding set of potential contacts"* by linking the initial contact with others in the target group through 'chain' referrals (Atkinson and Flint, 2001, p. 1). As well as reaching marginal social groups, snowballing can help build a relationship of trust between the researcher and informants.

The intermediate contact has some preliminary knowledge of the study and the key researcher before suggesting the next link. Although this also raises the problem of bias discussed below, this initial vetting can be helpful where individuals are discussing personal experiences and divulging sensitive employment information.

However, there are potential problems with the practice. Snowballing is not a random process, since the choice of respondents will be influenced by the initial contact and their restricted knowledge or associations. This may result in a cloning syndrome, where each respondent is much like the next, sharing similar traits, interests or patterns.

One solution suggested by Atkinson and Flint (2001) is to launch several snowballing 'chains' at once, each with a short line of links, rather than one long, single chain. The advantage is that, by relying on a much wider pool of initial contacts, we minimise the perpetuation of similar types.

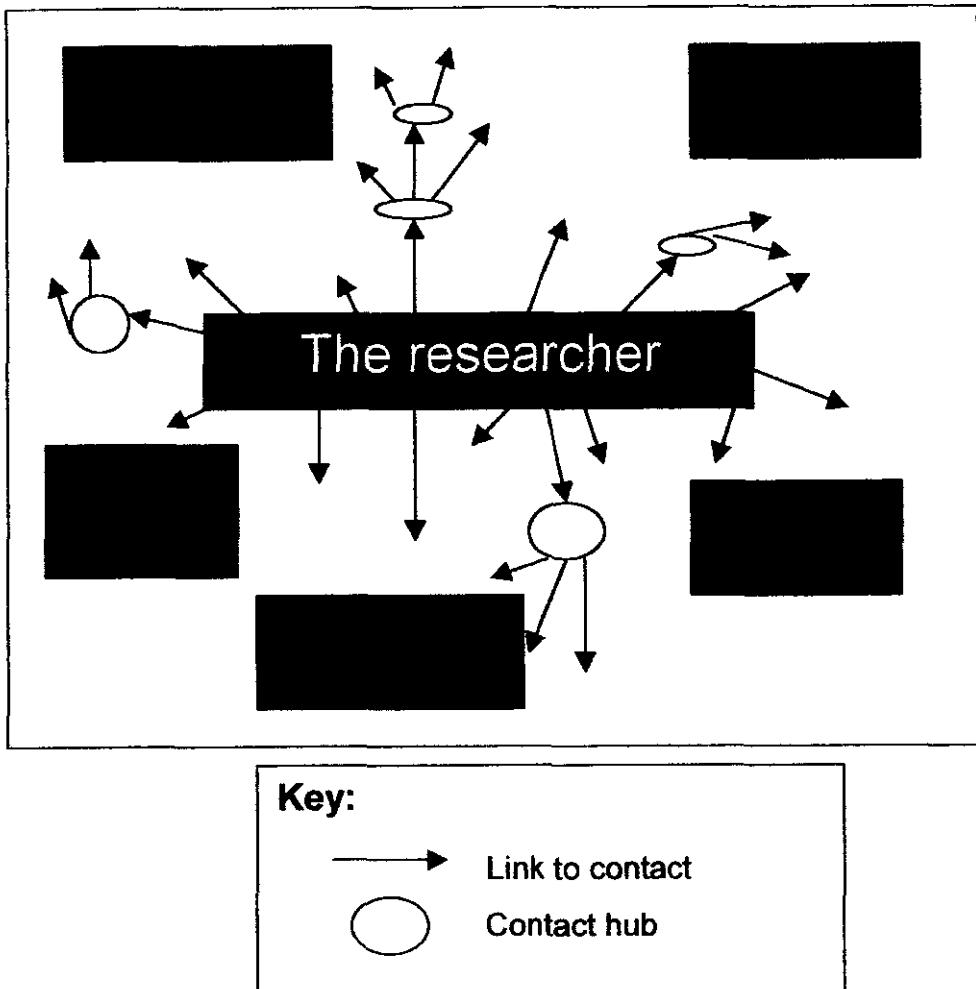
As I began my search for interviewees, I noted five chief sources of contacts for the research:

1. My friendships, formed during and since my time in newspaper journalism, television research and broadcasting policy work;
2. My family links, connecting me to their friends, associates and work colleagues operating in the media industry;
3. My local ties as a longstanding resident of Islington, in central London, with close and near neighbours who were freelancers;
4. My academic setting at the Open University, where a number of colleagues volunteered contacts;
5. My voluntary media work for the British Society of Gerontology, an academic society of practitioners and researchers, leading to freelancers operating in the media.

These were distinct and autonomous sources, each with their own histories and associations. They formed separate starting points which, at the outset, had unknown trajectories. As these trajectories unfolded, they were documented on a large 'contact network mapping' chart (see Figure 4.2 on the next page). With myself at the hub, I recorded the name of each person at the start of the initial snowballing chains - there were 15 - and then mapped out the subsequent links, in sequential order.

Not every single conversation, email or correspondence was recorded, since there were far too many of them. The intention was to map my route to those individuals who eventually made a substantial contribution to the research. It was important to know whether any one chain had dominated; whether these chains overlapped with each other; and whether their paths strayed across media sub-sectors and informant types.

Figure 4.2. Contact Network Mapping Chart



The finished chart makes fascinating reading. Of the 15 chains:

- Three went no further than that first link. These three individuals gave lengthy interviews and the chain ended there;
- Four chains extended for up to three links, providing useful, informal details for the research, but no leads to a main interviewee;
- One chain led to three other contacts, each of whom led to one interviewee each;
- Seven chains provided the vast majority of interviews, 45 individuals in total.

This breakdown accounts for the 51 people who formed the final study group. It is interesting to look back at the different formations which developed from these major chains. The most productive, resulting in 14 interviewees, began with a face-to-face interview in my kitchen with a neighbour who lived close by and had been freelancing for many years. The contacts which

followed this encounter cut across the two sub-sectors of newspaper, book and magazine publishing and new media, and across informant types. It led to interviews with seven other individual freelancers of varying ages and gender, as well as to three key informants and three employers.

Only one interviewee was suggested by more than one chain, suggesting that these 15 chains were operating in a reasonably independent way. Pursuing these parallel chains meant that the enquiries were diverging, rather than becoming increasingly narrow and clone-like. There was an absence of encounters where the contact said: 'You must talk to such-and-such', only to reveal the name of a person I had approached months earlier. However, a consequence of this strategy meant that I never felt I had gained complete mastery of the freelance world. There seemed always another avenue to explore, and this sense of a world beyond my reach was compounded by this powerful, if rather exhausting, sampling process.

Many more individuals were recommended than could be followed up. Links lay dormant, either because the suggestions were felt to offer insufficient contrast or because I needed to set new contacts to one side whilst I pursued others more likely to fill outstanding targets. Towards the end of each interview phase, there was a growing anxiety about expending too much time in gathering data, and insufficient time in analysis.

It is not possible to reproduce my network mapping chart here for ethical and practical reasons. Its multiple but diverse chains would be hard to represent on A4 paper. Without identifying the role of each member of the chain, the chart would lose much of its significance. For ethical reasons, it is not possible to associate informants with network hubs which might lead to their recognition.

4.9. The research instruments

Once potential interviewees were located, there began a lengthy chain of contact. This usually started with a telephone call or e-mail to establish interest, followed by a letter written on headed Open University notepaper, enclosing a brief printed synopsis of the research. A separate, although similar, synopsis was produced for each of the three main types of interviewees: individual freelancers, key informants and employers. (See Appendix 02 on the research

prospectus.) The synopses explained the background to the research, the main research questions, the time scale, biographical information about the research team, a promise of anonymity and contact details. The synopsis was also available as an electronic document.

Once co-operation was secured, it was necessary to find a suitable date and location for the interview. This could be an unpredictable affair. The intention had been to interview in blocks, beginning with the oldest freelancers, going on to younger freelancers, key informants, employers and ending with a phase of repeat interviews with freelancers. But the 'snowballing' method made such neat time-fabing impossible. Recommendations by freelancers needed to be followed up fairly swiftly, before the informants changed roles or moved on to other jobs. This was further complicated by the uncertain availability of interviewees. Some individuals preferred to be interviewed within days of the first approach: they had gaps in their schedules and, perhaps, wanted to get their contribution over and done with. Others agreed to appointments which were postponed with regularity, due to ill-health, accidents, work commitments or holidays. Sometimes months elapsed between the first approach and the actual interview. Often the same difficulties arose for subsequent interviews, leading to protracted exchanges by e-mail and telephone. In one case, negotiations continued for 15 months before the first and second interviews were secured.

From Figure 4.3 (on the next page) we can see that the interview phase of the study lasted for 16 months from September 1999 to December 2000. There were clusters of interviews in certain months but only in August 2000 were there no interviews of any kind. As will be discussed later, the on-going nature of snowballing and interviewing created problems in allocating sufficient, uninterrupted time for the analysis of material. It was also difficult on occasions to label interviewees clearly as either freelancers, key informants or employers. A number had been in other roles immediately prior to the research interview, such as:

- employers who had been freelancers;
- key informants who were also freelancers;
- freelancers who occasionally acted in the role of employer, hiring other freelancers for projects.

Figure 4.3. Interviews with study group members by month			
	<i>Individual Freelancers</i>	<i>Key Informants</i>	<i>Employers</i>
1999			
Sept	+		
Oct	+++		
Nov	++++	+	
Dec	+++++		
2000			
Jan	++	++	
Feb		+++	
Mar	+	+	
Apr	+		
May	++++		+
Jun	+++R		
Jul	R	+	
Aug			
Sept	+++++	+	
Oct		++	++R
Nov	RRRR	+	+++
Dec	R		+++

Key:-

+ First interview

R Repeat interview

Turning to the location of the face-to-face meetings, Figure 4.1. on page 68 shows that 13 of the first interviews (and four of the second interviews) took place in relatively public places, namely neighbourhood and central London bars, cafes and restaurants. In these cases, I could never be sure where we would end up and under what conditions the interview would take place. Until the interview was underway, it was impossible to know how private these conversations would be, how crowded the venue and how deafening the background noise. In fact, in all cases, the interviews proceeded without difficulty. This was largely due to a small, but revolutionary digital recording system which I detail in the next section.

4.9.1. MiniDisc technology

My reason for experimenting with digital technology was not because I had anticipated such hostile interviewing conditions. The initial incentive had been to prevent further recording errors which had led to the loss of two important interviews with freelancers. I had used a high quality audio tape recording machine but a combination of inexperience and design limitations had led to failed sound tracks. In their book on qualitative data analysis, Miles & Huberman urge us to own up to the very worst disasters which befall us in the field (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 281). These lost recordings - of lengthy, frank and rich exchanges with freelancers - qualified as substantial misfortunes. As a result, I felt I needed a more reliable and user-friendly recording system for interviews.

MiniDiscs appeared to offer this. They were compact, light and small. The face or screen of the MiniDisc player displayed a rotating icon confirming that the recording was underway, and a further icon for the sound level. It would be hard for even the most inexperienced of sound recordists to fail to capture the spoken word. I did, in fact, manage a third disaster by failing to realise that a MiniDisc cartridge cannot be recycled unless the first recording is deleted. I had hoped to record over a previous, un-related recording, but instead lost a third interview.

The MiniDiscs proved indispensable, however, in the bars, cafes and restaurants where so many of the research interviews took place. These locations were convivial meeting places and near to the informant's home or office. The modest-looking MiniDisc player and microphone would sit discretely on a café or bar table, often part-hidden by glasses, sauce bottles or crockery. Whatever the background noise, the voices of the interviewer and interviewee were captured with digital clarity, often more accurately than could be heard in real life. When these recordings were replayed, it was rare for even one word to be lost, even though levels of restaurant Musak or customer chatter seemed impossibly loud.

As a result, the MiniDisc player became an important research instrument in the study. It permitted interviews to continue in otherwise difficult environments. I was able to agree to whichever location proved to be the most convenient for informants, and manage to record the encounter as well. It is hard to imagine audio tape technology achieving the same degree of accuracy and completeness.

But for MiniDiscs, a sizeable number of interviews would have been captured in note form only and possibly may not have taken place at all.

4.9.2. Electronic mail

Another important research instrument used in this study was e-mail. The vast majority of informants had e-mail addresses and monitored their electronic mail fairly regularly. E-mail proved useful in feeding back initial thoughts after the interview, asking for clarification on certain issues, and keeping people informed about the research. It was also used by interviewees to send me information which they thought might be relevant to the research and for updating me on any changes to their freelance status. E-mail proved particularly useful three months after the completion of all the interviews, when I need to check on a number of facts about the freelance informants. I was able to send e-mails to the great majority of individuals and receive swift responses. In so doing, I discovered that the circumstances of a number of individuals had changed substantially and this was integrated into the body of the research.

E-mail was not without disadvantages, though. In certain cases, freelancers relied on a partner's email address and this meant using the partner as a go-between. Other freelancers accessed their email only rarely, or chose to ignore approaches. E-mail could not replace the telephone or the face-to-face interview as a way of imparting and eliciting the richest and most pertinent facets of relevance to the research. Still, it extended the channels of communication and, on many occasions, supplied important information that might otherwise have been lost.

4.9.3. Informant databases

A further tool in this research was Microsoft Access, a software programme for designing and constructing databases. Three separate databases were built, one for each type of informant. The fields of enquiry included basic biographical information, such as names, addresses, gender, media-sector and job title, as well as details of research input, such as dates of first and subsequent interviews, interview location and interview transcription status (whether completed or not). The fields were added to and modified as the research proceeded. The databases proved invaluable in monitoring progress over study group targets on gender, age and media sub-sectors.

The report function in Access allowed me to extract any combination of fields, such as the age profile of individual freelance interviewees, the sub-sector mix of employer interviewees, and so on. As the study neared completion, it proved a helpful resource in pulling together a number of charts about informants, such as Figure 4.3. on the timing of first and repeat interviews and Appendix 05 on the profile of individual freelancers.

4.10. Data generation

Once an interview was completed, there began a series of activities, each generating separate but complementary groups of data for analysis.

- a) By the end of that day or the next, a detailed **interview summary sheet** had been written⁵.

This included factual information about the informant and the circumstances of the interview; impressions, insights and surprises about the nature of exchanges; queries, uncertainties and concerns over the content; and ideas for further lines of questioning. The MiniDisc recording was often replayed and used as an aide-mémoire. In the case of the three lost recordings, the summary became the main source of information about those interviews. The summary sheets were valuable not only as written memos about the research interview itself but as springboards for self-reflective thoughts about the research as a whole. These helped to identify gaps, frustrations and puzzles about the study group, the interview strategy and the nature of the freelance employment relationship. Although these summary sheets were analysed later as primary documents, their main value was in guiding and challenging the research process at every step of the 16-month-long interview phase.

- b) Information about the interview was entered into one of the three **Microsoft Access databases**. These became permanent and evolving records about individuals and the study group as a whole, the targets for interviews and the location and timing of meetings. As mentioned above, these became a rich and valuable source of information for the research and, especially, for statistically-based appendices, charts and figures.

⁵ In exceptional circumstances, the interview summary sheets took longer than 24 hours to complete. This happened on only four occasions out of the scores of interviews and subsequent meetings which took place. Two interview sheets were written two days later, one sheet three days later and a fourth, six days later due to an intervening period away. The intention was to make the interview summary sheet as near a contemporaneous record as possible.

- c) The interview summary sheets were used as the basis for a follow-up letter and/or e-mail to the individual freelancer. This usually contained my thoughts about the interview and queries for further clarification. The **post-interview responses** which followed from informants - by e-mail, letter and telephone - were often enlightening and were preserved in hard copies and electronically. They were used later as primary documents for analysis.
- d) A number of **second interviews and subsequent meetings** and exchanges took place with individual freelancers. Similar procedures applied, and this extended the body of evidence on which the findings were based.
- e) **Written records** were gathered, stored and documented. These ranged from web sites generated by individuals or companies, to contracts issued to freelancers, to curriculum vitae and business sales literature.
- f) Finally, **interviews were transcribed** either in full or part. This involved transferring the digital sound stored on MiniDisc to audio cassette, since it was not possible to find (if one existed) a MiniDisc transcription machine. Much of the sound quality was lost in the process. As a result, only the clearest recordings were sent to a professional transcriber and once completed, these were checked against the digital recording. A total of 14 interviews were sent for transcribing: 7 interviews were with individual freelancers, 4 with employers and 3 with key informants. In order to ensure consistency, the transcriber was issued with guidelines on the layout and style of transcriptions. Completed transcripts were sent to me electronically, allowing these to be corrected on screen and then imported into a data analysis programme.

4.11. Data Analysis

How, then, was this data analysed? This section explains the methodological approach to analysis. Broadly speaking, this conformed, firstly, to the tenets of abductive reasoning (Blaikie, 1993), and, secondly, to procedures commonly associated with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

In an abductive research strategy, theories emerge from the language, meanings and activities of social actors (Blaikie, 1993). The task of the social scientist is to extract and interpret the motives, perceptions and experiences of its members in order "... to discover and describe this 'insider' view, not to impose an 'outsider' view on it." (Blaikie, 1993, p. 176). Thus, theory is constructed from the bottom up, rather than being imposed from the top down in the form of hypotheses or grand theories. Categories, concepts and explanations come from the understandings of individuals involved in the process under investigation. Social science researchers move from lay descriptions to more technical, theoretical concepts, rooted in the everyday accounts of individuals.

Blaikie believes abductive reasoning can be found in its most explicit form in Grounded Theory, the analytical strategy described and advocated by Glaser and Strauss and based on inductive principles dating from the 1920s (Burawoy, 1991)⁶. Although Glaser and Strauss - and others writing after them (e.g. Charmaz, 1995) - saw their method as inductive, Blaikie believes it conforms more closely to abduction⁷. Theory generation is seen as *"intimately involved in the process of research rather than being something that precedes it"* (Blaikie, 1993, p. 191); it is an on-going process or dialogue between the researcher and the researched. Grounded theories emerge from the research setting and evolve as the research proceeds. As Strauss explains:

⁶ For a history of Grounded Theory, see (Burawoy, 1991, pp. 274-276, Strauss and Corbin, 1994, pp. 275-278, Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, Epilogue pp. 35-6).

⁷ Blaikie sees abductive reasoning as distinct from inductive reasoning (Blaikie, 1993, especially chapters 5 and 6 on inductive and deductive reasoning, retroductive and abductive reasoning, respectively, pp. 131-161 & pp. 162-197). However, in the literature on methodology, the two concepts appear to be less distinct. For instance, Patton defines inductive analysis as meaning that *"the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being decided prior to data collection and analysis"* (Patton, 1987, p. 150). This accords closely with Blaikie's definition of the abductive strategy, where everyday concepts and meanings provide the basis for social action, interaction and accounts which are used to form social scientific descriptions and to generate social theories or perspectives (Blaikie, 1993, p. 177). Perhaps the clearest contrast between abductive and inductive reasoning is provided by Denzin (Denzin, 1989, pp. 166-170). His 5-page description of analytical induction allies it more closely with experimental designs or models, where initial statements are drawn up, tested and modified in a neutral process which ends in some general or universal truth. Investigators using analytical induction, says Denzin, search for empirical instances that negate the causal hypothesis by following a number of steps. An early hypothetical explanation is formulated; this is tested against one case. If the hypothesis does not fit, either the hypothesis is reformulated or the phenomenon is redefined to exclude the case. The process of examining, re-defining and re-formulating cases continues until the researcher settles on a universal relationship between all the cases. This formulaic process is not one which was followed in my own research. As a result, I prefer to see my strategy as abductive, rather than inductive.

“Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection.”

(Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 273)

Grounded Theory is seen as a pragmatic, open-ended and flexible method for engaging in social scientific enquiry (Turner, 1983, Turner, 1988, Blaikie, 1993, Charmaz, 2000). The suggested guidelines and procedures allow researchers *“much latitude for ingenuity”* (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 273). The ‘bottom up’ nature of grounded studies requires informal, non-prescriptive procedures so that the researcher may reflect and adapt to the setting.

“Starting from facts rather than theory makes it impossible to apply a research protocol in the sense of predicting and codifying all the operations to be carried out along with their progress over time. What we have here is a very different research strategy whose fundamental characteristic is adaptability to the contingencies of the field.”

(Baszanger, 1998, p. 370)

This pragmatism is one of the central principles of Grounded Theory identified by Alvesson and Sköldberg in their detailed critique of the methodology (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Their list includes the following:

1. **Pragmatism** - a philosophy which implies sticking as closely as possible to practical, empirical reality;
2. The intensive **study of the unusual**, rather than the general - idiographic rather than nomothetic research, where particular cases, not widespread, numerous ones, are of prime interest;
3. **Qualitative methods** rather than quantitative;
4. **Exploration** rather than confirmation - entailing a flexible method of data collecting, where the selection criteria are revised during the research process, as are preliminary theories and concepts;

5. The use of **sensitizing concepts** to understand new relations, perspectives and world views - where empathy and judgement are important ingredients.

It is important to say at the outset that not all of the procedures laid down by Grounded Theorists were followed in this study⁸. Although a number of features were central, others were seen as unworkable or unnecessarily prescriptive. Thus, Grounded Theory was the guiding methodology, but not one that was followed slavishly. Where the practicalities of the field dictated it, Grounded Theory methods were adapted to suit. The central features of Grounded Theory which guided and were adapted for this research are listed below.

4.11.1. Multiple perspectives

A major feature of Grounded Methodology is its reliance on multiple perspectives. These, say Strauss and Corbin, must be pursued systematically during the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Only by incorporating many, diverse interpretations can we question and review our own interpretations. We aim to represent *"the voices of many"* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 145). As has been described earlier in this chapter, the freelance study group contained a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives and experiences.

4.11.2. Constant comparison

A central strategy within Grounded Theory, and this research, was the constant comparative method, where one individual case was compared with another, and with the themes emerging from the data. Concepts that appeared to apply to one setting or type of freelancer were judged against others, to estimate 'fit'. This meant comparing:

- the views, situations, actions, accounts and experiences of different individual cases;
- data from the same individual at different points in time or in different contexts;

⁸ These guidelines and procedures are most explicit in Strauss and Corbin's book on 'the basics' of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). However, in an earlier published chapter, they acknowledge that Grounded Theory is far from a 'pure' methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). It has been developed and applied to a broad range of subjects, disciplines, philosophies and settings. Its international application, through academic literature and computer-based software analysis packages, has further broadened its application and, in some cases, bastardised the original intent. This adaptation of the methodology has been further complicated by a split between the two original protagonists, Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser. In the 1990s, the authors were seen as having gone their separate ways, each believing that their version of Grounded Theory was the more faithful or appropriate (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, Epilogue).

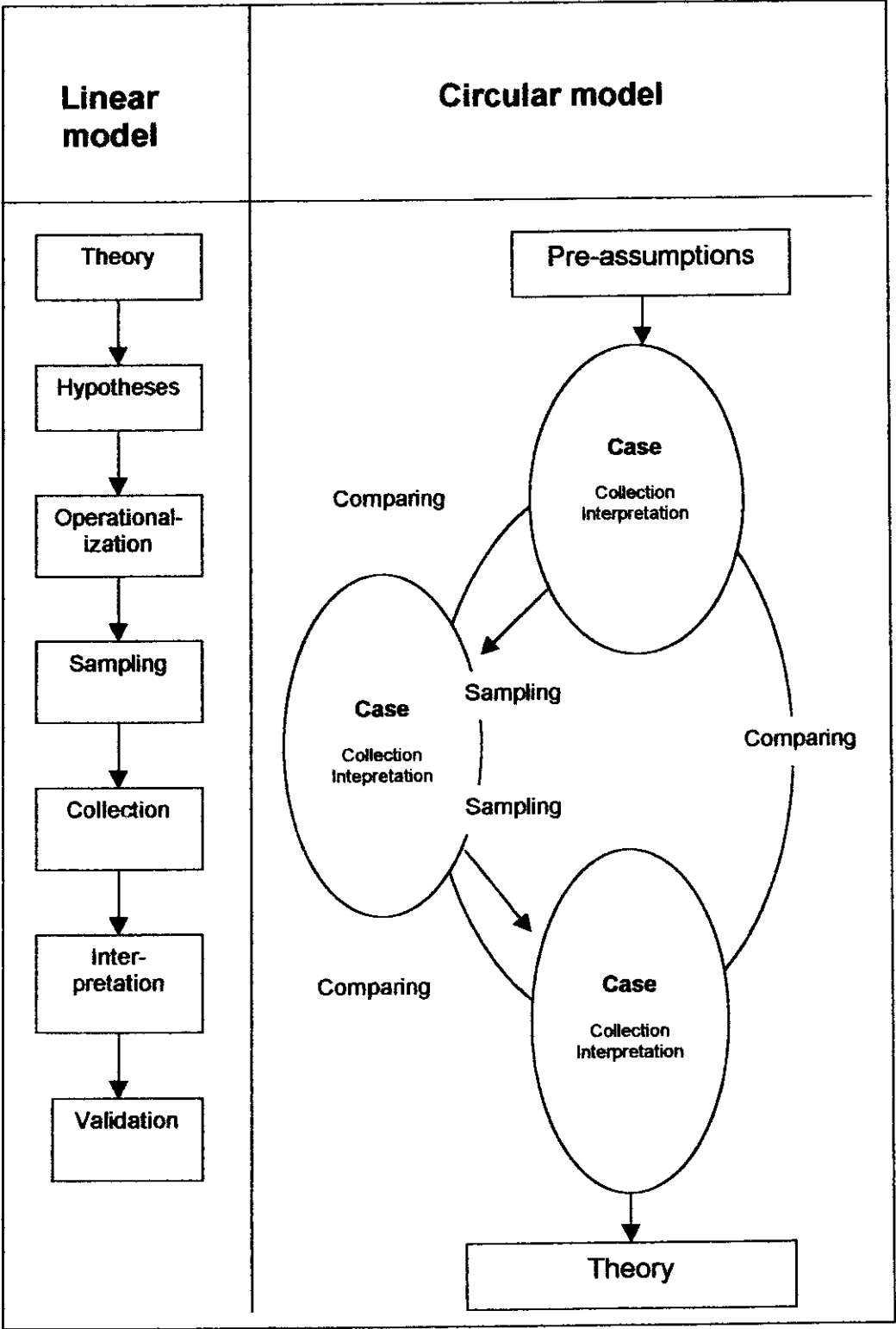
- incident with incident, such as stories about negotiating rates of pay as told by the same or different informants;
- data with categories, to see how well examples or incidents informed certain conceptual categories; and
- one category with other, to look at the way a conceptual category shed further light on, or challenged, certain themes or emerging explanations.

4.11.3. *Circularity in the research process*

A related feature is the circular, as opposed to linear, nature of the Grounded Theory approach. Seen as one of its strengths (Flick, 1998), the researcher is reflecting continually on data collection, analysis and theory formulation. The difference between the two models is displayed in graphic form in Figure 4.4, on the next page.

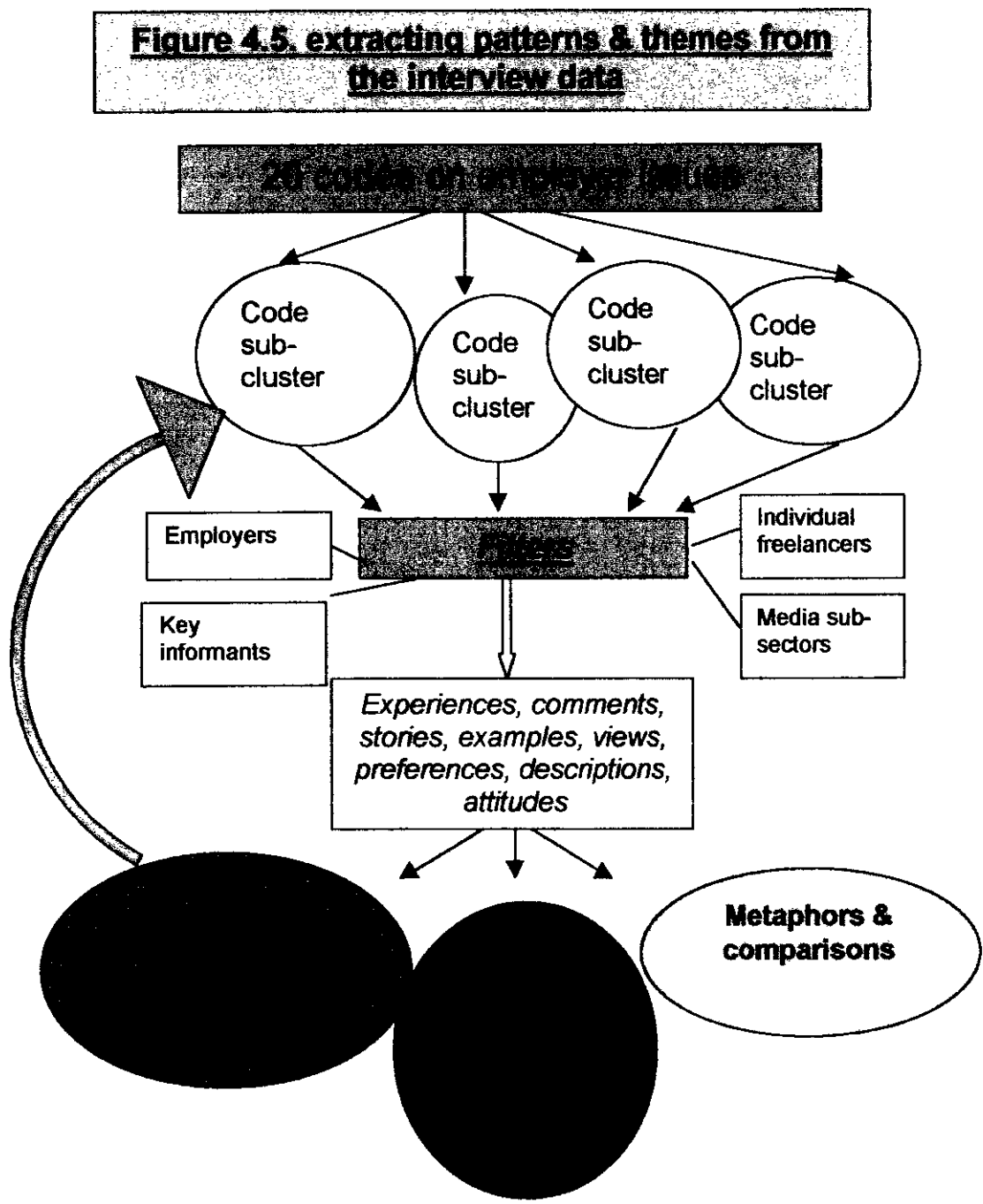
Facts gathered during the research process influence ideas and concepts which, in turn, inform further waves of data gathering, analysis and emergent theories. Explanations are constantly re-worked and modified in a reflexive cycle of repeated questioning about the methods, categories and theories which are suitable to the subject under scrutiny⁹.

⁹ I had hoped to use a computer-based project planning tool for this study. Having read Sharp and Howard's book on how to manage student research, I was convinced that their model for project management, the network planning process, would help me to organise and complete my research (Sharp and Howard, 1996). However, the most readily available package was Microsoft Project, a powerful programme which proved difficult to master and impossible to adapt to my methodology. The package was designed for a more linear project and was eventually dropped.



* Adapted from Flick, Uwe (1998) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications, Figure 4.1, p. 45.

Figure 4.5. below illustrates the way this operated in the construction of parts of Chapter 5, Freelance Employment Practices in the Media Industry.



4.11.4. Coding

The coding of data is a critical tool of the Grounded Theorist, allowing him/her to splice, categorise and conceptualise facts. According to Strauss & Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), coding helps the researcher to:

- handle a mass of raw data;
- analyse it creatively but also systematically; and
- identify and develop concepts which are the building blocks of theory.

Coding is defined as “...tagging chunks of text with labels... . that indicate the conceptual categories the researcher wants to sort them into...” (Weitzman, 2000, p. 804). Although coding was a central part of data analysis in my study, I departed from Ground Methodology orthodoxy in two ways. Firstly, I was unable to code the data as it was collected¹⁰. This was for practical reasons. The simultaneous collection and coding of interview data is premised on the idea of near-instant transcripts and coding competence. Neither was available in this research. The clustering and length of research interviews led to transcript log jams. Many months sometimes elapsed before transcripts were completed. Further, it took some considerable time for me to become familiar with and competent at coding. The delay was partly due to my decision to assess the merits of using a computer package for the purpose. Once the decision was taken, I then needed to choose between a range of packages and then acquire and master its workings. Even if I had been computer-ready and coding-literate, it is difficult to see how coding could have proceeded in tandem with data gathering. Coding requires concentration and uninterrupted time. Given my 'snowballing' strategy, and the unpredictability of interview bookings, coding would, in any event, have been a haphazard affair. The only way I could have observed this Grounded Theory edict was to have imposed an interview timetable on my freelance study group, a strategy likely to have damaged goodwill and jeopardised co-operation.

¹⁰ In Charmaz's chapter on Grounded Theory, she says, “We grounded theorists code our emerging data as we collect it. Through coding, we start to define and categorize our data. In grounded theory coding, we create codes as we study our data” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515).

Secondly, Strauss and Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) specify a hierarchy for coding, starting with open coding, followed by axial, selective and process coding¹¹. The final stage involves the conditional or consequential matrix. This overall method was seen as overly prescriptive and unhelpful. Such an orderly, and relatively linear, approach appeared to compromise the flexible and pragmatic essence of Grounded Theory. I used some of these coding strategies, but shied away from adopting them in anything like the form or order described.

4.11.5. Theoretical sampling & saturation

As has been described already, the study used purposive or theoretical sampling to construct the study group. This is a central dimension of Grounded Theory: sampling evolves during the research process, rather than being determined in advance. The aim is to maximise opportunities for comparison. This is achieved by focusing on samples that help to clarify, develop and 'saturate' theoretical concepts. However, there are two problems with this. Firstly, it supposes that the researcher can know or predict the suitability of an informant - and their ability to shed light on particular concepts - before the encounter takes place. As Strauss and Corbin acknowledge, this presumes 'déjà vu' on the part of the researcher (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 210). Until the researcher has finished the research interview, they can only guess at its likely use. In the case of the freelance informants involved in this study, only the scantiest of details were available to me in advance. I relied on recommendations and hunches, and this made it difficult to orchestrate the choice of informants in anything but the broadest of terms.

Secondly, it implies that we can achieve, or know when we have reached, saturation.

Saturation happens, according to Strauss and Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 212), when:

- No new or relevant data about a category is emerging any more;
- The category is well-developed in terms of properties and dimensions;
- Relationships between categories are well-established and validated.

This was seen as a difficult concept to apply to a process like freelancing. Although many of my coding categories did appear to be well-developed during the later stages of the research, it

¹¹ See also (Holloway, 1997, pp. 84-5).

was not possible to say how much further they could have evolved or changed after further interviews. The resource constraints - the lack of time in particular - was the actual reason why interviewing stopped. Saturation seemed an abstract and idealistic concept for a mobile, complex and 'boundaryless' employment state such as freelancing.

4.12. Computer-assisted Data Analysis

A number of authors have expressed concerns about the value of using computer software packages for analysing interview data (e.g. Coffey, 1999, Charmaz, 2000). Such authors warn of the dangers of using a machine to mediate between the researcher and researched. They see the analytical process as a close, fluid and creative event, where the researcher is in constant, unmediated dialogue with his/her data set. Such criticisms, however, underplay the advanced designs and bespoke nature of many of the most recent computer software packages. In fact, several have been created specifically with the Grounded Theorist in mind.

Even a decade ago, Lee and Fielding were highlighting the enormous efficiency gains to be found in computer-assisted qualitative research, with the computer depicted as a tireless and endlessly efficient clerk capable of categorising and retrieving vast amounts of data (Lee and Fielding, 1991). More recent publications have documented the substantial advantages of computers over manual methods (Weitzman and Miles, 1995, Weitzman, 2000, Barry, 1998). According to Weitzman (Weitzman, 2000), code-based theory-building software, intended for the researcher engaged in a 'grounded' methodology, is capable of:

- a) Coding - attaching key words to segments of text;
- b) Storing - keeping text in an organised database;
- c) Searching & retrieving - locating relevant segments of text and making them available for inspection;
- d) Linking data - connecting relevant data segments to each other, forming clusters of information;
- e) Memo-production - writing reflective commentaries on the data;
- f) Displaying - placing selected data in a condensed, organised form, such as a network, for inspection;
- g) Conclusion drawing - helping to interpret displayed data and test/confirm findings.

Further, computer-based methods help us to be consistent, by offering systematic search and query facilities. The speed of computer operations means that coding, sorting and retrieving can be done swiftly.

One particular code-based software programme, Atlas.ti, became an important analytical tool in this study¹². Powerful, fast and user-friendly, it provided a mechanical aid to what Miles & Huberman regard as the three core and concurrent components of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10):

- data reduction (organising, simplifying, categorising, coding...)
- data display (mapping, networking, representing ideas visually...)
- conclusion drawing and verification (challenging, modifying, re-questioning...)

Perhaps the best way to explain how data analysis proceeded, and how Atlas.ti supported this process, is to focus on a number of the package's defining features¹³. It is not possible to describe

¹² The author is indebted to the CAQDAS Networking Project at the Institute of Social Research, School of Human Sciences, University of Surrey. The Institute provides a range of support, training and seminar opportunities on CAQDAS – Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. In particular, Ann Lewins led an excellent introductory workshop to Atlas.ti on November 24, 1999, giving me both on-screen experience and step-by-step guides to the programme. Fifteen months later, on Feb 28, 2001, Ann Lewins and I met for a more advanced, one-to-one training session. We spent several hours working through a number of tools in Atlas.ti, using my own research data.

¹³ For a more comprehensive guide to the overall design of Atlas.ti, see (Weitzman and Miles, 1995, pp. 217-229) and (Barry, 1998). For a detailed technical guide, see the Short User's Guide, downloadable from the Atlas.ti web site, address <http://www.atlasti.de/shortman.htm>. I would also like to acknowledge the e-mail discussion list "qual-software", which provided a lively forum of debate and ideas about Atlas.ti and other qualitative research matters.

these in anything but the briefest of terms. But it is hoped that they provide an indication of how Atlas.ti reinforced a grounded, reflexive methodology. These features are:

1. The software's conceptual design;
2. The coding system;
3. Devices for managing the data;
4. Tools for conclusion drawing.

4.12.1. The conceptual design of Atlas.ti

Atlas.ti is designed so that large numbers of text-based documents can be treated as one analytical entity. The Hermeneutic Unit, as this data bundle is called, is the organisational and conceptual linking system for documents, data segments, ideas and visual maps. The component parts can be connected electronically and visually, allowing a seamless interplay between different data sources, extracts and concepts. The Hermeneutic Unit, then, became the place to store the growing body of material gathered for this study: interview summary sheets, post-interview responses, transcripts and other notes. More importantly, though, it became the site for theory-building, by providing a creative environment in which to begin the linkages, comparisons and explanations necessary for conceptual coherence.

As the research proceeded, the Hermeneutic Unit grew into a dense network of documents, codes, quotations and ideas. Yet it was possible, at any time, to see each 'bit' of information in its original electronic state. When recalling a coded passage or phrase, for instance, the software displayed the text as a highlighted excerpt embedded in the complete document. This was especially helpful in the latter stages of analysis, when segments coded years earlier might otherwise have taken on a 'disembodied' state, seemingly divorced from the document, person and the setting from which the information had originated.

4.12.2. The coding system

The individuals who were involved in this research were highly educated, creative, articulate and knowledgeable. They were able to express themselves in eloquent and vivid terms. These

descriptions and metaphors were captured in Atlas.ti's open coding system. Quotes, phrases or single words were often used as code labels, making the codes extensions of the 'lay' language used in the interviews and other encounters. For instance, phrases like 'Being amoebic', 'At the mercy of others' and 'Kow tow' became important coding hooks on which to hang a great many stories and sentiments about survival and exploitation in the freelance labour market.

Codes could be created, modified, merged or dropped at any stage in the analytical process. For instance, one particular code, created in the final phase of interviewing, led to an important insight into the employment relationship. The features editor of a specialist magazine had described in some detail the extent to which she relied on freelancers who had extensive and up-to-date knowledge of their specialist field. This prompted me to create a new code label called 'Cutting edge skills' and apply it retrospectively to earlier interviews with employers, key informants and individual freelancers. The coding system made such belated modifications easy. One interview or coding exercise could lead to a rapid review of other data and a re-evaluation of ideas, and in this case did so.

4.12.3. *Devices for managing the data*

The free-flowing, 'grounded' design of Atlas.ti offered much scope for intellectual creativity. However, there was a constant risk of 'information overload', leading to 'death by drowning' in the swelling mass of data. A tool which helped to avoid this was 'the family', a device for ordering documents, codes and other data into groupings. Two types of families were particularly important in this study: *document families* and *coding families*.

4.12.3.1. Document families

The document family allowed me to classify my data according to interviewee type. This meant I could compartmentalise documents into those from:

- Employers
- Key informants
- Freelancers with and without dependants
- Men

- Women
- Media sub-sectors
- Age bands

This made it possible to compare, through filtered query searches, the experiences of any combination of informant type, such as younger freelance men with their older or female counterparts. The documents could be scrutinised in numerous ways by layering the groupings. This was a crucial device in comparing one type of interviewee with another, and one type of experience, encounter or story with another.

4.12.3.2. Code families

Assembling the codes into sub-sets or groupings eased the task of further coding and formed the makings of larger explanatory ideas. The list of first-level codes was long and unwieldy. At any one time, more than 64 codes were actively being applied to the data. This made the coding of transcripts rather idiosyncratic in the early stages, since it was difficult to remember every coding variation and attach them systematically to data segments. This was overcome by the production of coding families, allowing me to see at an instant each code and its relationship to others. These families could be represented in their most graphic form using Network Views, a visually satisfying mapping device which could be imported into Word documents. As well as bringing together allied codes, these early visual clusters were the beginnings of the connections and relationships which were to lead to more sophisticated concepts.

4.12.4. Tools for conclusion drawing

The three features of Atlas.ti described above deal largely with data reduction and display. How, then, did I pursue the third element in Miles and Huberman's analytical model: that of conclusion drawing and verification? How were ideas developed and refined so as to produce more powerful and valid explanations about freelancing in later life?

Atlas.ti supported this conclusion-drawing process with its memo facility, allowing me to express in words my move from one analytical moment to the next. By working through and noting each twist

and turn in the accumulation of information, I could engage in a relentless, circular and iterative dialogue with the data. This on-going analytical narrative captured the setbacks, surprises, uncertainties and advances in my thinking. I was striving for “sharp, sunlit moments of clarity or insight”, to quote Miles and Huberman (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 74). Such moments were chewed over, tested out, developed and refined. I was attempting to expose false thinking, challenge my preconceptions and develop a more sophisticated approach to data analysis. To use the metaphor of the researcher as detective, I was checking out hunches, following up leads and interrogating the data in order to solve the intellectual puzzle. As Miles and Huberman say of qualitative researchers:

“Analysts do not march through data collection as in survey methodology; they scout around, sleuth, and take second and third looks.”

(Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 98)

Although this memo tool in Atlas.ti was used regularly at the beginning of data analysis, I switched to a word processing package - Microsoft Word - in order to achieve the same ends later on. The process remained the same, but Word was seen as a more versatile medium for generating, airing and consolidating new thoughts about the analysis and the research more generally. I felt better able to bring together the many other strands which were evolving at other research levels: the research questions, the study group composition, ideas based on my latest literature readings, the contemporaneous analysis of interviews, informal exchanges with freelance individuals, and so on. Each of the memos was kept in date order in a research diary file. Sometimes they were only a few paragraphs long; at other times, they ran to many pages. These diary entries became the critical mechanism for charting the slow advance towards clarity.

To illustrate this, it is possible to track the genesis of one central idea in the thesis. This idea was expressed by an experienced freelancer at a lengthy, face-to-face meeting during the first interview phase in the autumn of 1999. The individual had been asked what kind of freelancer survived in the media industry. The reply was to become highly influential during the final stages of analysis and thesis drafting 18 months later. It is worth exploring this example in some detail, since it helps to

shed light not only on the part played by memo-writing, but also on other aspects of the analytical process. In particular, it illustrates:

- The 'grounded' approach to data analysis;
- The use of 'lay' terms in the coding system;
- The part played by metaphors in sense-making;
- The analytical cycle, with data analysis informing and being informed by literature readings and early thesis drafts.

The relevant portion of the interview is printed below. This is a section of the transcribed interview which has been electronically imported from Atlas.ti and which still retains its code and document headings and date/time of import.

Hermeneutic Unit: older flexible workers

File: [c:\progra~1\scient~1\atlasti\textbank\Managing Freelance Careers]

Date/Time: 11/10/01 12:53:27

Selected Quotation

P25: Transcript.txt -25:163 (Document No. & text line)

Code: [Kow tow]

Interviewer: ... what kind of freelancer do you have to be to survive?

Freelancer: (Pause) You have to be a very malleable freelancer. This is what I meant about sort of not getting the best work out of people. You need to be easy-going, not really willing to say No', not willing to say 'I don't think you're doing this the right way, I think you could do better another way'. Is there a polite way of putting it? Malleable, is the polite way of putting it.

Interviewer: What's the impolite way of putting it?

Freelancer: Roll over backwards, you have to roll over backwards. You have to be mercenary, you have to be purely mercenary, which is, 'You tell me what to do, and I'll do it' sort of thing.

The contemporaneous Interview Summary Sheet, written shortly after this interview, noted the key ideas. I had paraphrased some points and reproduced others verbatim, using the Mini Disc recording of the interview, since there was no transcription at this point. The following brief paragraph, overleaf, is an extract. The original layout has been preserved.

➤ **Amoebic nature of freelancing**

"Adjusting to... subsume and digest whatever's been coming along..." (7 mins in). To be a successful freelance, you have to be malleable, easy-going, a yes-person, always agreeing with the way things are done, mercenary, and prepared to roll over backwards.

'You tell me what to do and I'll do it.'

Interview Summary Sheet: publishing consultant, editor and writer

This early note contained two ideas. The first, about the amoebic nature of freelancing, resulted in this being used as a code label, not only to segment this transcript but to splice other transcripts later on. The second idea was the freelancer's term 'malleable'. It seemed an interesting notion at the time and the phrase was coded using two related labels during the line-by-line analysis of the interview transcript some months later. It was some time, though, before its full value was realised. This came during a series of failed attempts to turn the wealth of interview data and analysis into a coherent account of freelancer-related findings for the thesis. In a series of self-reflective diary notes, written over a four-week period, I document the frustrations of trying to construct an early draft. Finally, in a lengthy note on images and representations, prompted by my current reading of two chapters from the research handbook by Denzin and Lincoln¹⁴, I suggest that malleability might be a useful metaphor in overcoming the literary block I had faced in the previous weeks.

A number of authors have described the power of metaphors in the analytical process. Morgan says such vivid imagery can *"open our minds to a systematic and novel way of thinking"* (Morgan, 1997, p. 66). By attaching a single image or multiple images to our data, we stretch our imagination and broaden our view (Janesick, 2000). We step back and move up an analytical notch (Miles and

¹⁴ See (Richardson, 2000, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Huberman, 1994, p. 250-2). Inevitably, metaphors are partial and incomplete abstractions.

Nevertheless, they can bring unparalleled gains to the interpretation of complex text-based data. In this instance, by using a metaphor, I was able to navigate my way through an immense amount of material relevant to the freelancer's perspective.

During the interview, the word 'malleable' had been used by the freelancer to mean obedience and acquiescence. But, as I reflected further, I saw that there were other ways of looking at the term. There was a more adaptable and resilient form, which I had missed up to that point. Malleability came from the Latin, meaning 'enduring the hammer' - the opposite of brittle, fragile or friable. By isolating the term from the transcript and examining component parts, I could see more clearly the subtleties of the freelance relationship. Malleability, according to dictionary definitions (Gove, 1961, p.1368, Simpson and Weiner, 1989, vol. 9, p. 270) meant:

- Being fashioned or adapted, extended or shaped by pressure...
- Being formed or transformed...
- Not rigidly fixed in condition or direction...
- Open to outside forces or influences...
- Adaptable to other conditions or needs or uses...

This ambivalence - being compliant on the one hand and robust on the other - proved to be a valuable conceptual device, transcending coding boundaries and challenging ideas about the freelance employment relationship. It prompted me to ask more questions of the data. How was malleability achieved? What form did it take? What happened when it was absent?

These quandaries sent me back to the primary texts, where I could test, develop and question this notion further. The result was a more sophisticated understanding of the way in which freelancers sustained their freelance careers (see Section 6.4., Sustaining the freelance relationship, in Chapter 6, The Freelancer's Perspective). In this way, writing became the method of analysis and discovery, as well as the end product (Richardson, 2000).

4.13. Problems with the methodology

The 'grounded' methodology appeared to suit the process under investigation. As has been described elsewhere, freelancing was a moveable, volatile state. This was not a linear or static employment entity, but an inherently disorderly one. There was a lack of uni-directional progression. There were sideways moves, simultaneous activities, blurred job descriptions, changing markets. There was an overall 'rulelessness' which a 'grounded' methodology was well-suited to cover. However, there were also difficulties in relying on a 'grounded' approach to analysis.

4.13.1. Gaining clarity

Piecing together a coherent tale about a chaotic process from such a diverse study group was an inordinately difficult undertaking. As the 'malleability' example shows, theoretical insights could take weeks, months and sometimes years to emerge. On occasions, the coding structure helped to bring together ideas and set up the structures for chapter sections. At other times, the code labels and families seemed to be singularly unhelpful in achieving this. My files are testimony to the hundreds of memos generated by the analysis. But bringing some kind of linear order to this iterative process was immensely time-consuming and exhausting. It required blocks of concentrated effort, plus a kind of suspended optimism that the process would eventually bear fruit. This was hard to maintain given the other competing pressures on my time, not least the protracted 'snowballing' method for locating informants.

4.13.2. Lay concepts

This difficulty was compounded by my reliance on 'lay' concepts. It meant that it was hard to relate the findings to wider theoretical debates. The everyday language used by interviewees appeared to offer limited depth and theoretical purchase on the broader issues of flexible working in later life. As Alvesson and Skoldberg point out, researchers who rely on a 'grounded' methodology are at risk of restating the obvious (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

One solution, suggested by a North American researcher on the mailbase discussion network 'qual-software', was to introduce two types of labels for coding, one which drew on the relevant academic literature and another using terms familiar to research subjects¹⁵.

This was offered by him as a useful way to foster synthesis and theory construction and avoid the inherent problems of deriving theory from grounded data. However, this idea was of limited use in this study. Given the paucity of adequate literature on the subject of this thesis, and the limited theoretical underpinnings, such a device would have restricted the analysis to overly-narrow terms.

Proximity to data

Whilst the 'grounded' methodology kept me close to the data, it also meant that I was engaged in a constant introspective gaze. This led to a paradoxical position. On the one hand, I was attempting to look outwards, to become absorbed by the process under scrutiny and to immerse myself in my subject. On the other hand, the methodology urged me remain inwardly focused. I needed to understand the principles of the methodology, apply them systematically and derive meaningful insights. It felt hard to remain focused on the subject of freelancing in the face of so many methodological concerns. Meetings, seminars and reading lists about methodology vied (more successfully at times) with similar opportunities to understand freelancing in the media industry. A grounded methodology might have brought me closer to the data than other methodologies in one sense, but in another, it proved a constant distraction, interrupting periods of time 'in the field' in order to complete the analytical cycle. For each research encounter, I seemed to pay a methodological price: time was needed for analysis, transcriptions, coding and further introspection.

In the latter stages of the research, I felt a sense of remoteness from the subject of my enquiry - compounded by the neutral location of most interviews and the seemingly endless variations in the type of freelancers and freelancing, mentioned earlier. As a novice researcher, I was expending a great deal of time mastering the computer-based software, and the many other processes involved

¹⁵ William N. Kaghan, PhD, Seattle, Washington State, USA, e-mail to the Qualitative Software mailbase discussion list, 16 February, 2000.

in 'grounded' research. This affected the time available, especially in the latter stages of research, to undertake follow-up interviews.

4.13.3. Validating findings

Finally, a 'grounded' methodology leaves us with the difficulty of validating the findings. Where is the evidence to show how our primary data led to theoretical insights? What formats can we use to offer transparent proof that we have focused on the important facets, have retained a neutral stance and have represented our findings in a fair and balanced way? In short, how does the 'grounded' researcher reproduce the "audit trail" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 282)? Miles and Huberman pose the problem thus:

"Most qualitative researchers work alone in the field. Each is a one-person research machine: defining the problem, doing the sampling, designing the instruments, collecting the information, reducing the information, analyzing it, interpreting it, writing it up. A vertical monopoly."

(Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 262)

The authors advocate data displays, matrices and tables in order to show the basis on which conclusions were drawn. But despite attempts to produce such matrices using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, I found them unsatisfactory devices for handling large chunks of data. The abductive analytical strategy meant that findings emerged in a circular, iterative manner. It was hard to document a constantly evolving set of ideas whilst retaining the attention of the reader and keeping within the word limit of a thesis.

Another solution to this "crisis of validity" (Gergen and Gergen, 2000, p. 1026) experienced by qualitative researchers is to involve research participants in the checking of findings and early drafts. The critical comments of informants become part of the analytical process, helping to clarify, modify or refute the content and direction of the research. It had been my intention to build such a consultative phase into the study. I had hoped to feed back early sections or drafts to informants so that they could help shape subsequent writings. However, sections and drafts never seemed to be

quite finished. The constantly evolving nature of analysis meant that each piece of work could always be improved, if not overhauled entirely. As Blaikie says of the workings of a 'grounded' researcher:

"The publication of a report on the research is only a pause in the never-ending process of theory generation."

(Blaikie, 1993, p. 193)

There were disincentives, then, to showing early drafts to informants. This was exacerbated by the make-up of the study group, which aimed for maximum diversity. Findings represented a composite view of freelancing, rather than the stories and interpretations of one case followed by the next. Was I not asking the impossible of informants? How could they judge the authenticity of experiences that were not their own? They might be able to comment on some elements of the findings, but not others which were outside their media sub-sector or occupational knowledge. It would have been difficult to know which precise section they should see. And how could they comment intelligently without having sight of the entire report, which was never complete, of course? The consultation exercise became an increasingly impossible ideal.

4.14. Reflexivity in the research process

The main way in which this research tried to represent issues fairly and honestly was by adopting a reflexive approach, not only in the analysis but in the design of each aspect of the study. Lincoln and Guba define reflexivity as *"the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher"* (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 183). Mason defines the term more broadly as the means by which the researcher moves constantly between intellectual and practical issues, making sensible, informed and strategic decisions about the research enterprise (Mason, 1996). The research proceeds in a self-critical manner, each step subject to scrutiny.

This chapter has attempted to document the story of this self-critical research journey. I began by reflecting on my professional interest in the subject and my journalistic and policy background. This was instrumental in shaping the overall design of the study, the research questions and its location

in the media industry. Frequent diary notes were made during the three years of the study, detailing methodological difficulties and solutions. Each advance in thinking and in the actual doing was detailed, often after much critical reflection, literature searches and discussions with colleagues and/or supervisors. The self-reflection continued during the search for appropriate research instruments, the formation of the study group, the methods for gathering data, analysis and theory-building. Finally, in the writing of this chapter, diary notes were reviewed and the methodology literature re-read and supplemented. In the act of laying down a first draft, new insights were gained into the merits and limitations of my approach. No doubt there were times when I justified an act in retrospect, after the pragmatic considerations appeared to suggest no other route. But in the main, the intention was to bring integrity, honesty and practical solutions to the research process.

CHAPTER 5

FREELANCE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES IN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the key characteristics of freelance employment practices in the media industry. The chapter relies on two main sources of information. Firstly, it cites research findings about working conditions in this sector. Since the early 1990s, the media has become an increasingly popular location for academic and industrial research. A growing number of researchers have examined the effects of rapid and profound organisational, legislative and industrial change on media working practices. Although the position of older freelancers is hardly discussed, this substantial literature provides a useful backdrop for this present study.

The second source is the group of media employers interviewed for this study. 'Employers' here mean those individuals who were in charge of a particular product, strand, section, unit or service and who had some management responsibility for freelancers. These employers were directors, editors and managers of a broad range of media enterprises, including newspaper and magazine titles, publishing ventures, television strands and multimedia design projects. They had direct or overall responsibility for some aspect of managing freelance labour. They saw freelancers as representing a considerable presence within their department, unit or enterprise. Although this presence varied over time, employers had come to rely on freelance workers to undertake a range of junior and senior tasks.

Nine interviews were conducted with employers and a further 13 interviews with key informants. (See Appendix 04 for a breakdown of employer and key informant research participants by media sub-sector.) Key informants were individuals with an overview of freelance employment in their sub-sector. They included trade union officials with direct responsibility for freelance matters and managing directors of recruitment agencies which handled freelance contracts.

Inevitably, the findings reported in this chapter are skewed towards the three main sub-sectors chosen for this research:

- newspaper, magazine and book publishing;
- radio and television broadcasting; and
- new media.

Where relevant, though, other sub-sectors such as film are cited.

The chapter begins by giving a broad overview of employment trends since the 1980s. This is followed by a section on freelance definitions and multiple freelance use among employers. I then analyse the key components of freelance working, based largely on the in-depth, face-to-face interviews with employers and key informants. (See Appendix 06 for a key to interview excerpts used in this and the next chapter.) This covers the attractions and potential risks of freelance labour, the operation of informal networks, freelance pay and the supply of freelance labour. The last section examines the relative value of age and experience within the industry.

5.2. Media industry overview

The media industry is a collection of diverse activities, practices and organisations. Broadly, it embraces the cultural, creative, entertainment and information sectors and, typically, includes radio and television production and broadcasting; newspaper and magazine publishing; multimedia design; film and video creation; public relations and advertising; music and records. But precise and widely shared definitions are lacking. Briggs and Cobley (1998) suggest the reason is due to the diversity of the media and their distinctive business interests, audiences, products and services. Each is separate and in "*a state of perpetual flux*" (Briggs and Cobley, 1998, p. 1).

A detailed history and profile of the media industry is beyond the scope of this study¹. It is important, though, to highlight a number of employment trends that have a direct bearing on this research. These are, firstly, the increasing value of the media industry in terms of jobs and revenue; secondly, its fluid and converging boundaries; and thirdly, the increasing casualisation of its labour market since the 1980s.

¹ See, for instance, (Weymouth, 1996), (Briggs and Cobley, 1998) and (Stokes and Reading, 1999) for a breakdown and description of media sectors in Britain. A good historical overview of the press and broadcasting sectors is to be found in (Humphreys, 1996) and (Seymour-Ure, 1996).

5.2.1. The value of the media industry

The media industry is seen as vibrant, expanding and increasingly valuable in terms of income generation, exports and employment (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2001). According to 1998 Government estimates, the creative industries², of which the media is a part, were growing at nearly twice the rate of the economy as a whole, and generating revenues of £60 billion a year. They were contributing more than 4% to the domestic economy and employing around 1.5 million people (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, p.002). By 2001, revenues had nearly doubled to £112.5 billion, exports were in the region of £10.3 billion and the contribution to the domestic economy had grown to more than 5% (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2001, 00.11). Employment had risen too, in the software and computer services sector, publishing, television and radio, as Table 5.1. below shows.

<u>Table 5.1. UK employment by media sector in 1998 and 2001*</u>		
	1998	2001
<i>Software & computer services</i>	420,000	555,000
<i>Publishing</i>	125,000	141,000
<i>Television & radio</i>	101,000	102,000

**Figures are estimates produced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for the Creative Industries Mapping Documents of 1998 and 2001 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2001). For employment estimates for Software & Computer Services, see page 12.01 of the 2001 report; for Television and Radio, see page 13.01 of the same report; for Publishing, see page 008 of the 1998 report and page 00.11 of the 2001 report.*

² The creative industries were defined by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as: "...those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2001, p.00.05). This included book, newspaper, magazine and digital content publishing; television and radio production and broadcasting; photography, filming and digital recording; multimedia and Internet design and production; and film and video production.

5.2.2. *The fluidity of the media industry*

The media industry's boundaries are far from tightly drawn. Most of the major media organisations now extend beyond their original territories, using a multitude of channels and platforms to offer a myriad of services (Davis and Scase, 2000). There has been a growing convergence of information systems, telecommunications and media technologies, leading to an expansion in multimedia and digital outlets, providers, producers and retailers (Hooper, 1996, Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). News agencies make cable television programmes; broadcasters publish magazines and books; newspapers run information services on the World Wide Web; and Internet companies broadcast television documentaries and radio shows.

Previously distinct sectors have become increasingly inter-dependent and inter-connected. This is due partly to collaborative ventures between 'rival' organisations, and partly due to mergers and take-overs, where large media groups acquire multiple, and often global, interests. For instance, the publicly-funded BBC has commercial deals with domestic and international partners to profit from magazines, merchandise, videos, archive programmes and many other products. Pearson plc, publishers of the Financial Times, presides over an string of global companies and activities dealing with business information, consumer publishing and education. Likewise, The News Corporation, owners of The Times and Sunday Times in the UK, has interests in film and television programming; satellite and cable broadcasting; magazines and books; promotional and advertising products and services; digital broadcasting; and conditional access and subscriber management systems (The News Corporation Ltd, 2001). Its companies are located in North America, Latin America, Europe, Australia and the Pacific Basin.

Media personnel can be found not just in media companies but throughout the economy. They might be engaged in media-related activities but their locations are in other, non-media sectors, such as financial services, higher education and manufacturing. A City bank, for instance, might employ a journalist to produce an internal magazine for one of its specialist departments. Or, a university might hire a multimedia designer to produce its educational web sites or to teach its media students.

5.2.3. Casualisation

Of particular note for this research is the prevalence of freelance working in the industry. The publication of early freelance 'survival' guides in the UK suggests that freelancing was already an established way of working for journalists in the newspaper industry in the 1920s and 30s (Hyde, 1928, Aldrich, 1935). However, it was not until the 1980s that freelancing appeared to become widespread across the industry, although patterns varied between sub-sectors, company types and occupations.

Although mobility between media sub-sectors and employers had always tended to be relatively high, the expectation until the early 1980s, for men at least, was for reasonable continuity of permanent employment. This was so especially of the larger and more stable employers, like the major broadcasters and national/regional newspaper groups. From the mid-1980s, however, a number of profound changes began to take place: the deregulation of the industry, the intensification of competition, the weakening of collective bargaining and rapid technological convergence.

The history of one sub-sector, broadcasting, illustrates the transformation in working practices and the rapid surge in casual working. Two main broadcasters, the BBC and ITV, had enjoyed relative stability and prosperity from the 1950s to the mid-1980s. The BBC's Licence Fee income had been rising annually as more viewers switched from the cheaper black and white to the more costly colour Licences. Its audience share in radio and television was large and relatively stable (Oliver, 1993). The ITV companies were generating healthy advertising revenue which permitted expansion and a diverse programme output. But a number of inter-related factors checked this growth: a changing broadcasting environment; a squeeze on income; and a Conservative administration promoting privatisation, competition and the free market.

Channel Four had produced a viable independent production sector which was leaner and, in many instances, equally innovative. Independent radio stations were proliferating, and satellite and cable operations were promising to offer a wide range of competitive services to challenge the existing terrestrial set-up (Graham and Davies, 1990, Maddox and Collins, 1990, Boulton, 1991, Green,

The Broadcasting Act (1990) stipulated that the BBC and ITV commission a quarter of their non-news programmes from the independent production sector, starting on January 1, 1993. This led to a substantial dismantling of in-house facilities and an extension in the use of flexible short-term and freelance contracts (Oliver, 1993). Independent production was further encouraged by the ITV franchise auction, when three new companies (Meridian, Carlton & Westcountry) emerged as franchise-holders, replacing established organisations with production staff and facilities.

Transparent demonstrations of efficiency were particularly important to the BBC in the run-up to the renewal of its Royal Charter in 1996. The BBC's solution to growing financial pressures was the introduction of the internal market in April 1993, termed 'Producer Choice'. The effect of this, and of previous one-off cost-cutting initiatives like 'Priorities for the Future' (1985) and 'Funding the Future' (1989), was the departure of growing numbers of staff through redundancies and early retirements. Numbers of staff employees at the BBC fell by 5,000 in the five years leading to 1993 (Platman, 1995).

Meanwhile, the position in ITV companies was also changing. Until the late 1980s, ITV companies had been regional monopolies financed by advertising revenue. They produced their own regional programmes and contributed to the ITV network. Their integrated commissioning and production processes entailed their own in-house facilities and personnel covering all components of the production process. There was a fairly high rate of trade union membership and the operation of national collective wage agreements - on differing scales. This also changed with the independent production quota and the blind bidding for licence franchises. In the regional Channel 3 companies, an average of 1 in 5 jobs was lost during a period of major restructuring between 1986 and 1992 (Ursell, 1998, Table 1, p. 137). In two of the largest companies, Central and Granada, more than 40% of posts went.

Meanwhile, the independent sector grew steadily. Independent programming commissioned by broadcasters rose from 323 to 4001 hours between 1984 and 1994 (Saundry, 1998). Skillset, the National Training Organisation for the audio visual industries, estimated that by 1994 there were in the region of 1,200 active independent production companies involved in commissions for

broadcast programmes, feature films, the corporate/industrial sector, commercials, music promos and facilities houses (Woolf and Holly, 1994, p. 117). The vast majority of these employed well under 50 people. Around 50 of the largest companies accounted for the majority of independent production for broadcast, and they had average staff numbers of 20. At the other end of the spectrum was the most volatile section of the industry, made up of around 500 companies, each consisting of 1 or 2 people.

Many jobs which had once been permanent were now freelance or contract. By the early 1990s, Skillset found that freelancing had become the predominant form of work (Woolf and Holly, 1994). The proportion of freelancers had risen from 39% of the total workforce in 1989 to 54% in 1994. More recently, Skillset undertook an industry 'census', which confirmed this picture³. These trends were apparent not only in the television, film and video sub-sectors, but in book publishing (Granger et al., 1995) and print magazines (Gall, 1998) as well. Trade union membership, which had once reached 80% density in the magazine sector for instance (Gall, 1998, p. 152), began to decline. Employers were increasingly reticent to bargain with, or even to recognise the legitimacy of, union leaders.

The successive waves of restructuring, 'downsizing' and organisational change appeared to affect the oldest media professionals disproportionately. This was due largely to relatively generous redundancy and early retirement schemes which rewarded length of service (Platman and Tinker, 1998). For instance, more than one fifth of all staff working for the BBC in the late 1970s was aged 50 and over. This had fallen to one tenth by the early 1990s. In many parts of the BBC, such as Television and Radio production, retiring at 60 had become rare. In certain central departments, such as personnel, policy and finance, no-one was reaching retirement age at all.

'Sweetheart deals' (where departing staff are assured of favourable freelance contracts), in conjunction with redundancy and/or retirement pay-offs, appeared to act as the springboard to successful freelance careers among the oldest age groups. Experienced workers were able to take advantage of downsizing, according to a case study of an unnamed Channel 3 company, Company

³ Skillset asked employers for estimates of the number of employees and freelancers used on one specified day (Skillset, 2000). This calculated that at least 35% of people working in the UK audio visual industries were freelancers. This figure was likely to be much higher, said the report, if all those freelancers who were economically inactive that day were taken into account.

X (Ursell, 1998). Those with the most marketable skills took redundancy willingly, confident of a lucrative freelance career.

<u>Table 5.2. Age profile of the freelance workforce in the broadcast, film & video industry*</u>	
<i>Age last birthday</i>	<i>%Weighted total of all freelancers</i>
<i>Up to 29</i>	17
<i>30-39</i>	39
<i>40-49</i>	27
<i>50 or over</i>	17

* (Source: Woolf and Holly, 1994, Table 2.1, p. 12)

An age profile of freelancers in the broadcast, film and video sub-sectors (shown in Table 5.2. above) estimated that 17% of its sample was aged 50 and over, representing nearly 1 in 5 of the freelance workforce (Woolf and Holly, 1994).

The British Film Institute Television Industry Tracking Study, a panel study of creative television professionals, found an age effect in the movement of staff and freelance members among its study group over time⁴ (Paterson, 2001). Younger cohorts increasingly moved out of freelance positions and into staff jobs. The reverse happened for those aged 51 and over: the composition of the group changed from one in which a third were staff members and a further third freelance to one where, four years later, more than half were now freelance (Paterson, 2001, Table 1, p. 500).

⁴ This was a panel study of television production workers - permanent, contract and freelance – conducted between 1994 and 1998 (British Film Institute, 1995, British Film Institute, 1997, BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999). The aim was to examine how technological, regulatory and organisational change had affected the careers of creative television production workers. Its longitudinal design involved an initial questionnaire and then two questionnaire/diary entrees twice a year. The panel included 72 production workers aged between 51 and 65 years, of which around half were freelance (British Film Institute, 1995, Table 5.2a, p. 18). Numbers of older workers who were still participating in the research four years later dropped by only 16 individuals, to 56 television workers (Paterson, 1999, Tables Q1 & D8, p. 5).

To summarise, freelancing became increasingly common in the media industry from the 1980s onwards. In some sub-sectors, such as broadcasting, it established itself among certain occupations as the predominant form of work. Experienced and skilled workers, especially those with lengthy staff tenures, were often encouraged to relinquish full-time jobs in favour of casual contracts and temporary assignments. Such moves were set against a positive climate of new digital forms and cross-sector ventures among established media players.

So far, the term freelancing has been left undefined. This next section examines the way 'freelance' is interpreted within the media industry.

5.3. Definitions of Freelance Employment

Freelancing as an employment form is said to have originated in the Middle Ages, when the term described soldiers who offered their lances to those nobleman who were prepared to pay (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, vol. 6, p. 166, Morris, 1995, p. 79). Free-lances were seen as free agents, without permanent bonds to any one individual. More recent definitions retain this idea of autonomy. Freelance workers are commonly defined as those without "*long-term contractual commitments to any one employer or company...*" (Gove, 1961, p. 906) and who are "*not employed continuously but hired to do specific assignments*" (Collins English Dictionary, 2000, p. 610).

Typically, they are self-employed professionals selling services based on their experience, skills and expertise to a range of employers (Laurance, 1988, pp. 3-4). According to Laurance (1988), they do not:

- sell products made by other companies;
- operate franchises;
- manufacture products;
- run retail outlets;
- provide wholesale distribution; or
- have large staffs or many employees.

Specifically in the media industry, the term is used to cover a large range of occupations and employment types, including self-employed consultants and those on short and long-term contracts. Skillset, the National Training Organisation for the audio visual industries, defines a freelancer as anyone on a contract of less than 365 days and/or who is registered for tax purposes as self-employed (Woolf and Holly, 1994, Skillset, 2000). This embraces a variety of freelance types, from the individual serving many organisations to the 'pseudo' member of staff employed on a succession of continuous short-term contracts for only one employer⁵.

Further evidence of this spectrum of freelance use emerged in the interviews conducted for this study with employers. There were four dimensions to this range. Firstly, there was a wide diversity in the *length and intensity of assignments*. Employers contracted freelancers for a varying number of hours, days, weeks or months. One project might require just a few hours' work on a *one-off basis*. Another might need a long stretch or a regular commitment. The intensity of these undertakings varied too, from a project, say, which needed exclusive attention until completion, to one that could be interspersed with other jobs elsewhere in the organisation or with work for other clients.

Secondly, employers operated *divergent contractual arrangements* and rates of pay. Some employers issued standard contracts, others depended on informal, unwritten agreements by email or phone. Some paid on an hourly basis, others a daily basis. Others, still, paid once the project, or parts of the project, were completed. There were variations in the way tax was or was not deducted at source and in the invoicing system.

Thirdly, there was a range of *levels of responsibility* involved in freelance working. Some individuals were recruited at very junior levels. In these instances, the freelancer was supervised either by the commissioning employer or by another freelancer who was at a more senior level. At other times, freelancers were in charge of entire events, with their own budgets and teams of specialists to manage. These freelancers might hire other freelancers as needed.

⁵ Skillset found that 22% of its sample of freelancers who were currently working (for companies which were not their own) had been in continuous work with their current employer for 12 months or more (Woolf and Holly, 1994, Table 2.5, p. 24).

Finally, employers varied the *place at which their freelancers were based*. Some expected freelancers to operate from their own premises, using their own equipment; others required that they were sited within their company offices. A few employers had one group of freelancers who worked exclusively from home, another from office premises, and a third who mixed the two.

At any one time, employers might be using freelancers in any combination of the above. There were likely to be wide fluctuations in the numbers and types of freelancers employed from one week or month to the next. Employers who were between projects might employ only a handful of freelancers or none at all. Once the work flowed in, or they were stretched due to the loss of in-house staff, the number of freelancers would swell. There were occasions when one or a combination of projects required an enormous influx of temporary labour, leading to a freelance pool many times larger than the total size of the permanent workforce.

5.4. The attractions of freelance labour for employers

Why did media employers use freelancers? Was it out of necessity or choice? What could freelance labour offer which permanent members of staff could not? Interviews with the study's employers revealed three core advantages of freelancers for employers: flexibility, affordability and 'instant' knowledge. Employers could vary the numbers and types of people they employed; they could minimise their overheads and fixed costs; and they could supplement their knowledge base. We now turn to these attractions in more detail.

5.4.1. Flexibility

The employers involved in this study looked to freelancers to provide them with flexibility in the way they packaged and produced their output or services. They faced intense competition from other enterprises seeking commissions from the same clients or serving the same media markets. This competition tended to take one of two forms. It was either competition at the point of commission or competition at the point of sale. In the **first instance**, competition at the point of commission, employers were pitching for work from potential customers such as broadcasting channels, multi-national companies, production companies or trusts and charities. They were offering to supply illustrated books, studio-based game shows, documentaries, contract magazines, radio or

television help-lines and design-based promotional events. Uncertain of the robustness of rival bids, employers needed to present a convincing, cost-effective and imaginative package of services to win the commission. If they were awarded the work, they then needed to deliver the precise skills, expertise and approach which had been promised. Rarely was the time frame in which to do so generous. Employers needed to attract reliable, creative talent at exactly the right time and for the allocated number of days specified in the initial proposal.

Potentially, the freelance labour pool offered the perfect solution. Freelances with the 'right' kind of skills and outlook could be recruited swiftly, without recourse to lengthy and formal recruitment procedures. They could begin on the day the funding started and be employed for a precise number of hours, days, weeks or months. Each of these commissions tended to involve a specific remit and target audience, and this could require a certain style and message. Even if the brief was vague, the employer generally knew, or thought they knew, what kind of product would appeal to the client. Freelance talent was an ideal source of labour, since the employer could, in theory at least, assemble an exact mix of expertise and vision, in varying numbers and time frames. This afforded the employer maximum flexibility in tailoring the creative team to the assignment.

In the **second instance**, competition was intense at the point of sale. The employer who produced a national newspaper or magazine, for instance, was vying for readers alongside other, similar products in the UK or international market. The output needed to be better or different, and altogether appealing. It needed to cater to its specialist market and demonstrate flair and imagination. The employer wanted the freedom to select the particular freelancer who would deliver, at that moment, a special angle, story or style to deadline and budget. In this way, the commissioning editor could vary the product, respond to new markets and test out a range of potential talent. This was especially important during times of internal organisational change. Media products were being re-designed, markets were shifting and organisations were being reconfigured. The employer could respond adeptly to the new demands of a restyled product by choosing different freelancers or varying the terms and conditions of their employment.

5.4.2. Affordability

Employers saw freelancers as a cost-effective labour resource. Where pay differentials between staff and freelance workers were narrow – in other words, where set daily rates for professional in-house and out-of-house workers were similar – freelancers represented excellent value for money. Employers who relied on freelancers to use their own equipment and work space made substantial savings on overheads. Where the freelancer had self-employed tax status, the employer was not expected to pay for holidays or sick leave, or to contribute to an occupational pension plan. In addition, there were no obligatory training or career development costs. An experienced freelancer rarely needed day-to-day supervision or management time either. The 'right' freelance recruit would simply get on with the task.

Certain freelance categories were in short supply, however, and here employers had to pay a premium. Examples during the period of the fieldwork were producer-directors in the broadcasting sub-sector and web designers in the new media sub-sector. Occasionally employers would offer permanent in-house positions to such freelancers, but unless there was a secure and continuous stream of relevant work, this was seen as an expensive and risky option. Another expensive, but less risky avenue, was to use the established network of a head hunter or talent agency. Recruitment fees could be high, though. The preferred route of all employers in this study was to build and rely on their own network of links to suitable talent, as is discussed in detail in section 5.6.1. on informal networks. This afforded the employer protection from inflexible overheads and long-term commitments. The organisation could ride out the lean times with the minimum of expense, and staff up the company to maximum capacity once the work flowed in.

5.4.3. Instant knowledge

Employers looked to freelancers to provide 'instant' solutions to their labour and product needs. They wanted people who were already equipped with the latest software skills or broadcast production technologies. Employer products or projects needed specialist and contemporary knowledge. Ideally, employers wanted to be able to extract these 'cutting edge' skills in a ready-made form. They looked to the freelance labour market to supplement their core team of in-house

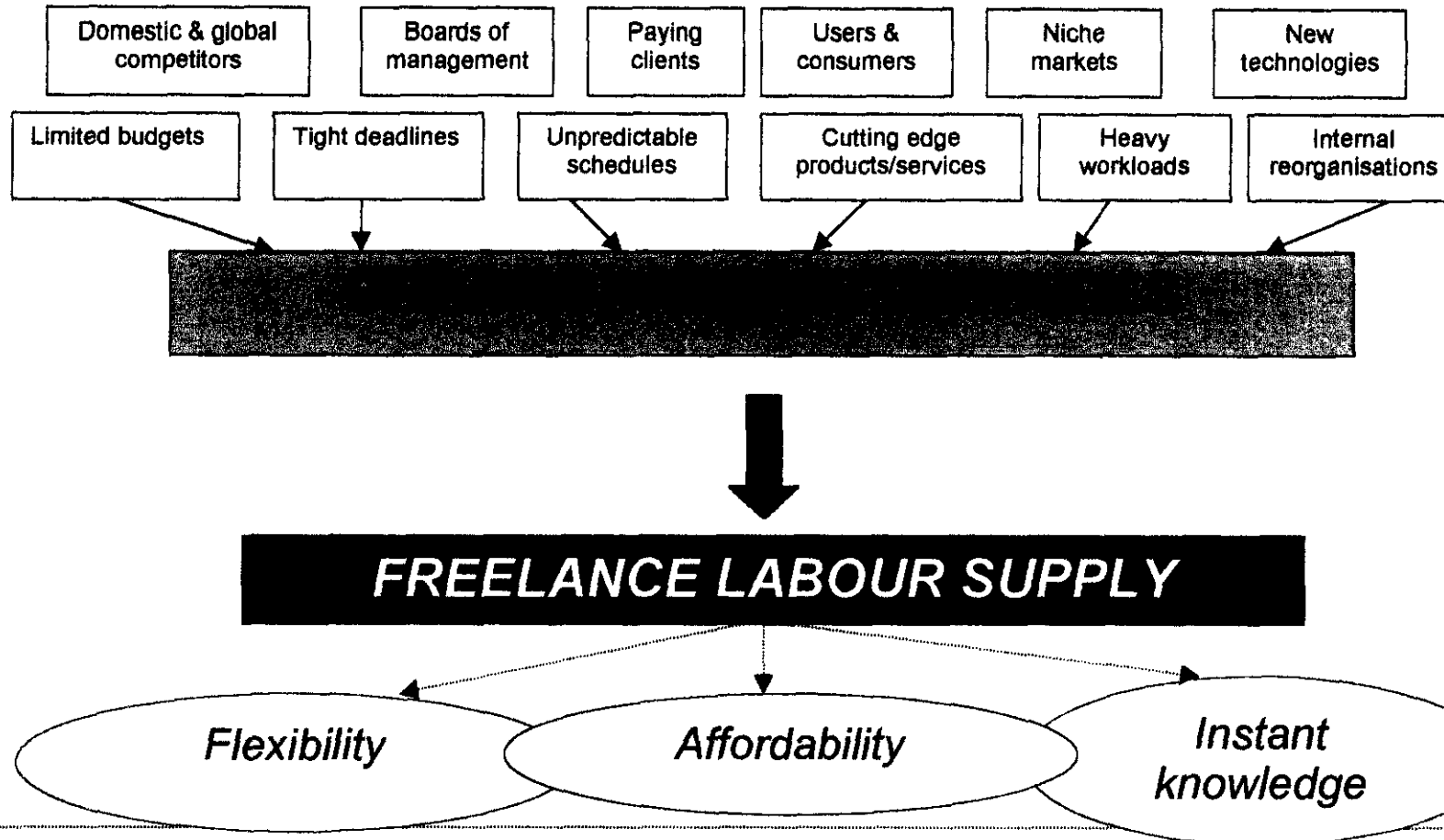
staff. By doing so, the employer could acquire, for the duration of the job, more experience, a broader range of skills, a higher degree of expertise and a new perspective.

Employers were reluctant to offer freelancers formal training. It was seen as the freelancer's responsibility to keep abreast of developments and changes in the industry and in their chosen specialism. There were exceptions to this. Employers facing acute new media skills shortages were prepared for freelancers on three and six months contracts to acquire new software skills involving in-house self-tuition, as long as they then applied these to the project in hand. Also, there were times when flexibility and affordability were more important than 'instant' knowledge. In these instances, employers were happy to recruit inexperienced freelancers, as long as they were relatively cheap and willing.

This general reluctance to offer or pay for training is born out by television industry reports on training demand and provision, highlighting a lack of formal courses or on-the-job training for freelancers. In the early 1990s, a study of freelancers in the broadcast, film and video sub-sectors found that 62% of the freelancers surveyed had current training needs (Woolf and Holly, 1994). More significant were the 83% of freelancers who had received no training at all that year. Similar proportions were found in a follow-up study four years later (Varlaam, 1998).

For the most part, then, employers expected to find a 'freelancer to go', and one who was competent and committed. They needed the project to be completed to a high specification and to the agreed timetable. Sometimes employers needed freelances to 'rescue' projects which had gone astray. On other occasions, the employer was hoping for a new 'spin' on a story, an unusual way of illustrating a subject, or the delivery of a piece of work to stringent deadlines. Whatever the pressure, the employer hoped the freelancer could perform the necessary steps to ensure delivery (see Figure 5.1. overleaf). There were dangers, however, in relying on an 'outsider' to meet the requirements of the task in hand.

Figure 5.1. The Appeal of Freelance Labour for Employers



5.5. The potential risks of freelance labour

Employers interviewed for this research were aware that their reliance on freelancers could exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the pressures of producing high quality output for their clients or customers. Freelancers could misunderstand the brief or miss the deadline. They might be unaware of recent developments in their field and offer dated or tired formats or ideas. In rare instances, they could leave the employer in the lurch by refusing an assignment at the last minute, or shedding the assignment before completion. More usually, they could simply be unavailable at the time when they were most needed.

5.5.1. Pressures of time

Employers who relied on freelancers to deliver a substantial proportion of their work tended, almost by definition, to be constrained by heavy workloads and unpredictable schedules. They had neither the time nor the administrative back-up to devise elaborate systems for finding, nurturing, securing and supervising freelancers. An illustration of this is to be found in the recruitment practices of one employer, a features editor for a specialist weekly magazine who commissioned articles from freelancers on a fairly regular basis. Having decided on the most appropriate writer for the particular assignment, she would ring to secure agreement, but felt she could wait for only a very short time for the reply:

Employer: "I suppose one of the things that happens is that you've got a slot, a bit of time in which you've got to commission something and you want to get it commissioned that day, that afternoon. You don't want to have to be thinking about it the next day. So there's bit of that, you know, the person that's available. You know, you might leave a message for somebody but if they haven't called back in half an hour, you'll ring somebody else. And..."

Interviewer: "What's the turnaround generally between commissioning and receiving?"

Employer: "... for me, it's normally two or three weeks.

Interviewer: "Oh right. But you'd still... you would only give them half an hour to get back to you?"

Employer: "Yeah. Well, I'm not saying that's absolutely religiously the case but, you know, just in terms of, 'Oh well, I've got lots and lots of things I've got to do.' If I've got three things I've got to commission, I want to do that before 5 'o' clock this afternoon, erm then, you know, I can't wait... you know, she might get back and say she can't do it anyway. Which means I've got to start again with somebody else, so... it tends to be a bit... yeah, I mean, but I ring people's mobiles if they've got them and ask them. But people quite often do turn you down. Most of the people we use, there's absolutely... there's no-one that we've got that we can assume they'll be able to do it..."

Features editor, weekly specialist magazine.

The employer needed an instant response, or as near an instantaneous response as possible. There was a risk in holding out for the preferred freelancer. That individual may have other commitments that prevented them from accepting the assignment. A delay would compress the time then left to find an alternative. And, importantly, a protracted commissioning process would divert the employer's attention away from other pressing duties.

Once the freelancer had agreed to the commission, there was no guarantee that s/he would deliver the brief. Where deadlines were critical, the late submission of work could have serious repercussions: production deadlines could be compromised and relations with the external client jeopardised. Time frames were generally non-negotiable. A delivery date agreed with the client often became a contractual obligation. If the employer needed to accommodate changes to the brief made by the client - such as a shorter turnaround - freelancers might be unable to co-operate and this meant employers were forced to seek others to complete the job.

5.5.2. Financial pressures

Another difficulty for the employers involved in this study was the limited budgets at their disposal. They were financially accountable to their immediate superiors, their management boards and/or the paying client. Some of the employers had no discretion at all over the size of their budget and the way it was spent. Others could influence the spread of spending but not the overall amount. A

third group, those with the most discretion, still needed to demonstrate a lean and financially sound operation which kept to agreed targets or budgets. An editorial director for a book publishing company, for instance, told of their financial auditing system which kept a tight reign on creative costs as a project proceeded. Managers of individual publishing ventures at this company were responsible for producing detailed bi-monthly financial statements for the board of directors, itemising previous, current and future costs, especially spending on out-sourced freelance editorial and production work. *In this way, the managers were constantly aware of day-to-day spending and the impact on financial targets.*

The risk of overspending on freelance labour was ever present. Sought-after talent might demand unreasonable fees. Inexperienced freelancers who charged a lower daily rate might prove to be an expensive mistake if they took double the number of days to complete the work. Equally problematic was the freelancer who submitted sub-standard work which required further input from the hard-pressed employer. Given the constraints on resources, the employer faced a constant dilemma between paying the minimum fee possible to complete the work and offering a rate sufficiently attractive to draw the best available freelancer.

5.5.3. *Creative pressures*

Finally, employers might find themselves saddled with freelancers who lacked spark, dynamism or ideas. In the highly competitive sectors in which they worked, employers needed freelancers to inject vigour and innovation into the project or assignment. Employers interviewed for this study were looking for fresh approaches, new names or faces, a different 'spin'. They were wary of complacency in their choice of freelances, and of relying on the *"same old, same-olds"*, to use the phrase of the development head of an independent broadcasting production company. This employer wanted freelancers from different and varied backgrounds, in order to offer the different and varied programme ideas and talent which she felt would appeal to television channel controllers.

Where employers were bidding for new contracts or commissions, it was felt of paramount importance to offer new formats, columns, stories, names and so on. The same was true of bids to retain clients second or third time around. For example, the editorial director of a contract magazine

publisher described how pitches for new or repeat business almost always involved plans for a re-jig of the existing product. This was the case even for magazines which had been run successfully by him for several years. Clients often showed a keen interest in knowing - and occasionally vetting - the freelance names proposed for a project. It was important for the employers to choose, say, an author, columnist, designer, presenter or producer-director who would deliver the appropriate style and thus help secure the bid.

Given these multiple and potentially serious pitfalls, employers needed freelancers in whom they could trust. Ideally, these freelancers both understood and responded willingly to these financial, creative and time pressures. Employers were looking for “synchronicity” in their working relations with freelancers. It helped to have a shared vision and a mutual respect. One employer, a specialist editor of a national daily newspaper, cultivated and relied on a small group of respected freelancers whom she called her “stable”.

“With my stable, they know if I say, ‘Do that’, they know what I’m talking about just because it’s the way we work. I mean, they’re basically extensions of the office. They just happen to be in out stations.”

Specialist editor, national daily newspaper.

Another employer, the head of multimedia at the London office of a European design agency, liked to work with one freelancer who, he said, could practically mind-read his requirements.

“With (this freelancer) I hardly even have to communicate with him what I want. ‘I want it like that’ or ‘I want it like that’ and ‘I want all that stuff in there’... .. It practically operates on telepathy. You know, and then we just say, ‘I want it in, imagine that style and that animation and I want it to work quickly.’ And because we’ve worked together a lot... That’s the easy thing. When you work with people over a period of time, and you know each other, you don’t really have to say very much about the job.”

Multimedia head.

This freelancer needed little to no supervision and was adept in predicting and then offering appropriate solutions. The employer could trust the freelancer to provide a thoroughly professional service. It was a harmonious and mutually beneficial employment relationship, albeit limited to the life of the temporary assignment. The freelancer was responsive and, in this instance, extremely quick at completing the task to a high standard.

How, then, did the employer find these trusted freelancers? This next section examines the role of freelance networks in matching flexible labour to work needs.

5.6. Freelance networks

Finding reliable and suitable freelancers at precisely the right time was a formidable challenge for employers. They needed people for a limited time, sometimes for only a day or a week. After the project was completed, they may not need their services for some considerable time. Formal recruitment methods were seen as costly and cumbersome for these short projects, especially where deadlines and budgets were tight.

5.6.1. *The informal network*

By far the preferred method among all the employers interviewed for this study was to rely on their own informal networks. Personal and professional contacts were seen as a ready-made and cost-effective route to a freelance labour supply. This informal network was flexible, responsive and inexpensive. It consisted of a range of connections to former and current employees, colleagues, competitors, friends, family and clients. At its most efficient, the network could produce the 'right' freelancer at exactly the right time. Typical ways in which employers described the process were these:

"... you ask around, you know. You ask the people you do know, 'Do they know anybody.'

It's like any industry, you know. Most of my friends are journalists... well, a lot of them. And

most of their friends are journalists. So you ask your journalists' - freelance journalist's - friends whether they've got any freelance journalist friends..."

Features editor, specialist weekly magazine.

"We use word-of-mouth a lot and often it's suggested to me that I should see somebody because they're promising. And, conversely, I might ask around if there's a particular role to be filled. And with e-mail that's increasingly easy to do, in that I could compose an e-mail request and send it out to my opposite numbers in a number of different publishing companies... people who are friends..."

Editorial director, publishing house.

"... a lot of the time, a lot of people know a lot of people. Seems to be how it does work. It's quite a small industry... .. everyone knows everyone and people are constantly moving around, constantly moving around."

Creative director, design agency.

The informal network was a complex series of relationships which crossed traditional organisational boundaries. It was seen as perfectly legitimate for employers to approach friendly rivals just as easily as immediate colleagues in the pursuit of freelance talent. The distinction between professional and personal friendships was blurred. Employers who had worked in the industry for some time had established close and enduring relationships with a range of professionals, and these professionals tended to be highly mobile. Thus colleagues could swiftly become competitors and then compatriots again. The fluidity and churn within the media industry allowed the informal network to expand and evolve, and for freelance labour to be shared among trusted peers. The sub-sectors were seen as sufficiently small, the specialisms narrow and movements between staff positions so regular as to give employers the impression that they had a fairly good grasp of the freelance talent available to them.

The informal network, as perceived by employer interviewees, appeared to have four distinct advantages over formal recruitment methods: firstly, its elasticity; secondly, its speed and directness; thirdly, its reliance on 'known quantities'; and fourthly, its links to the most sought-after talent.

Firstly, then, the informal network was an elastic mechanism for finding freelances. It could:

- stretch beyond immediate contacts, tapping labour pools unknown to the employer;
- be applied in a comprehensive or a highly selective fashion, depending on the requirement;
- involve one or a multitude of channels, such as mobile telephone, e-mail and word-of-mouth;
- involve a variety of settings, including chance encounters in the street, informal lunches or formal media events.

The employer could choose the most appropriate medium and strategy in order to find the required freelancer.

Secondly, the informal network could produce near instantaneous results. It was a direct, speedy and manageable way of finding talent. One telephone call or one remark to an office colleague could elicit a promising candidate or list of candidates. The employer had been spared a possible avalanche of applicants, or an unproductive trickle. There had been no need of a recruitment intermediary either.

Thirdly, the informal network delivered 'known' quantities. These freelancers were either familiar to the employer or to the contacts which the employer had approached. They had been recommended and, thus, were deemed of proven worth. The degree of trust was especially high for freelancers who shared an employment history with the employer. This had usually involved a close and productive professional relationship in the recent past:

- the freelancer might have previously been a respected member of staff for the employing company;
- the employer and freelancer might have worked together as employees for another company or as freelancers.

Trusted status was also accorded employees of rival firms who had recently become freelance. For instance, the creative director of a design agency judged the talent emerging from its main

competitors as having instant credibility. Those rival employees who were looking to widen their experience as freelancers were attractive propositions by dint of their association with prestigious rivals.

The informal network was also useful in checking out unfamiliar names. Employers were reassured if they could run a potential candidate passed a friend or colleague.

"... we all sit in a little huddle together and if someone wants something they just shout out: 'Does anyone know what this bloke's like?' Or: 'Has anybody used 'x'?'"

Editorial director, contract magazine publisher.

These instant checks acted as safeguards against candidates who appeared promising on paper, so to speak, but who were 'difficult' in reality. Employers needed to avoid freelancers who were "a complete nightmare to work with", to use the words of the creative director of the design agency. This could be due to their attitudes, abilities or personalities. The informal network acted as an early warning system to steer the employer clear of freelancers who were problematic. One key informant in the publishing industry caricatured the concerns in this way:

"...you don't know what sort of crackpots you're going to come across I parody freelancers but a lot of it's true. You don't know the person who, when the cat dies, is going to have a complete you know flip-out and is not be able to work for a week. You simply don't know."

Owner, editorial services agency.

Fourthly, the informal network was seen as harbouring the most sought-after talent. Experienced freelancers with a proven track record and a steady stream of work were seen as being less likely to register with recruitment agents or to feature in data banks of freelancers published on the web or in book form. This was especially so for freelance talent in short supply. It was more likely that such individuals would be known already to the employer, either as a tried and tested freelancer or

as a name with some visibility in the industry. They may have worked on projects for their own or rival's productions, newspapers, magazines or periodicals.

The importance of informal networks is confirmed by a number of studies on freelance employment in the television, film and multimedia sectors (Woolf and Holly, 1994, Jones, 1996, DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, Saundry, 1998, BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999, Gill and Dodd, 2000, Blair, 2001). For instance, Saundry's study of the UK television industry found that personal contacts were crucial to an independent producer's chances of winning a commission (Saundry, 1998). Nine out of 10 independent production companies surveyed for the research used direct contacts to recruit workers for their productions (Saundry and Nolan, 1998, p. 419).

5.6.2. Supplementing the informal network

For the employers involved in this present study, there were times when the informal network failed to deliver quality candidates at the right time. One employer spoke of scraping the barrel on occasions, and another, of only just meeting their freelance needs. Freelancers who had been recommended informally were not always willing or able to start at the required time. In theory, the informal network was an infinite resource. In practice, however, it tended to radiate around a number of close and trusted colleagues and friends. In addition, it was a random mechanism. 'Asking around' was dependent on who happened to be 'around' at that particular moment and in that particular place. It also depended on which freelance names were uppermost in the contact's mind. There was an element of chance and opportunism. Recruitment was open in one sense, in that any freelance individual could find themselves at the end of a line of networked connections. In another sense, the network was closed to those who did not happen to feature in the list of recommendations at that juncture. The forgotten or omitted freelancer might never know that a freelance position had been free, nor why they had failed to make the shortlist.

Employers had an assortment of back-up mechanisms to supplement the informal network. These varied between sub-sectors, freelance types, project needs and budgetary constraints. However, they tended to be more formal ways in which employers identified and kept in touch with suitable freelancers. The five loose groupings listed below were rarely used in isolation. Rather, they were part of an assembly of methods which complemented the informal network:

- responses to speculative approaches from freelancers, such as unsolicited c.v.s or story ideas;
- data bases of freelancers for the exclusive use of in-house staff;
- small, specialist single operator agents, such as diary services in the broadcasting sector;
- out-of-house data sources, such as published yearbooks or electronic registers on the web;
- freelance-friendly employer policies.

5.6.2.1. Responses to speculative approaches

All the employers involved in this study received unsolicited approaches from freelancers. Typically this involved the freelancer sending ideas, career details and/or completed work (either for publication or as an example of their capabilities). Employers could feel overwhelmed at times by the volume of speculative contacts, either because there was a sudden increase in numbers or because their work commitments had become so pressing that they were unable to respond appropriately, if at all. Sifting the material was labour-intensive and generally unsatisfactory. Finding exactly the right career profile amid the piles of c.v.s which had arrived that week was unlikely to be fruitful, unless the employer had put out the word that s/he was looking for a certain type. Equally, sifting through speculative manuscripts or articles was extremely time-consuming and, again, unlikely to unearth a perfect fit. Employers said they were simply too busy to act as career counsellors or talent brokers. Vague and unfocused approaches were instantly discarded.

5.6.2.2. Data bases of freelancers for the exclusive use of in-house staff

Two broadcasting sub-sector employers who were interviewed had created in-house databases in order to list the range of freelance talent available to them. This fulfilled a number of functions. Firstly, it collated and managed the unending flow of unsolicited material. Secondly, it identified particular specialisms, such as language skills, which the employer might need in the future. Thirdly, it could track the availability of freelancers, especially those who were sought-after. Fourthly, it served as a record of the freelancer's employment history with the organisation. Fifthly, it was an exclusive and bespoke point of reference for in-house managers.

However, in-house databases were not without their limitations. Search mechanisms could be insensitive and the choice of entries overwhelming if all or almost all c.v.s had been entered into the system. A more selective system for data entry involved a time-consuming trawl by senior managers which could defeat the time-saving objective of the data base.

5.6.2.3. Small, specialist single operator agents

Employers in the broadcasting and publishing sub-sectors used one or two-person specialist agencies which provided a specific type of freelancer. An example in the broadcasting sector was a diary service for technical experts, where a single operator, as the point of contact for a cluster of professionals, could tell the employer whether the particular freelancer would be available that date, week or month. An instance in the publishing sector was a writing collective involving editors, journalists and publishers. Commission charges for these services were relatively low or minimal. The agent was able to extend the employer's network and keep a track of availability.

5.6.2.4. Published data sources

Employers could turn to a growing range of published sources which listed freelance talent. These ranged from annual compilations of freelancers based on membership of a particular society or union to electronic registers which changed constantly and which were searchable on the web.

5.6.2.5. Freelance-friendly employment policies

Employers who were almost entirely reliant on freelance labour felt that freelance-friendly employment policies could give them an edge in attracting the best people. Two of the employers in this study prided themselves on being prompt payers. A third, a broadcasting production company, employed a talent specialist whose job it was to manage freelancers exclusively for that company. Another production company held occasional master classes and transmission parties in order to project a supportive image and to keep in touch with its

favoured freelancers. Christmas parties, flowers sent on special occasions and feedback from clients were other ways in which employers tried to keep in touch.

5.6.3. Formal recruitment

Finally, employers used formal recruitment methods to locate suitable freelancers when all else failed: either by paying for the services of a recruitment agency or by advertising for posts nationally or in specialist publications or platforms. Rarely were these formal means popular with employers. An advert in a national newspaper or magazine, for instance, would involve a substantial amount of time and money: employers feared they would be besieged with applications, causing a drain on resources. And there was no guarantee that the right candidates would surface anyway.

Another relatively formal avenue was to use the services of a recruitment agency. This had a number of advantages. The recruitment agent might have a wider pool of potential candidates on which to draw; they could sift and select using a range of sources, including adverts in the press and on the web. However, agency fees could be substantial, especially for sought after talent or for highly specialist skills. Given the short-term nature of most freelance assignments, employers found this an expensive option.

5.7. Freelance pay

Employers were prepared to pay premium rates for certain freelancers. Interviews with the employers and key informants involved in this study revealed two main categories of well-paid freelancers. Firstly, there were the 'star turns', those freelancers who could enhance the marketability, branding and appeal of the media product or service. The employer believed they could draw in readers or viewers by offering something unique, different from or better than competitors. Examples were high profile, possibly controversial, columnists for magazines or newspapers, or popular, witty or challenging 'celebrity' presenters for television or radio shows. These individuals often employed agents who negotiated fees, royalties and other benefits on their behalf. They usually had regular slots and part-guaranteed earnings.

A second type of valued freelancer was the specialist who was in short supply. S/he had skills that were seen as essential to the successful running or output of the media operation. Examples were computer software designers who were able to adapt new technology to the needs of a particular client, or producer-directors with extensive studio or location filming credits on broadcast productions. These technically proficient specialists were engaged in project work where demand had outstripped supply. They were indispensable to media employers and could thus command a higher rate. The reasons for lack of supply ranged from a technological advance which employers wanted but which was known, at that particular moment, to only a very few individuals in the industry, to a traditional skill known to a dwindling number of individuals.

Experience did not appear to have value on its own, measured strictly in financial terms, i.e. by fees. Unless a freelancer fell into the 'star turn' or 'specialist-in-short supply' category, they were likely to have seen a drop in the value of their earnings over time. In fact, the longer the individual had freelanced, the more their rates had declined in real terms. This was due to a number of factors:

- deregulation of the industry, leading to growing competition from an increasing range of domestic and international media organisations;
- greater expectations among client companies for lean and accountable financial operations from their commissioned suppliers;
- competitive tendering for project work, forcing media suppliers to offer the lowest or most cost-effective bids;
- the lifting of blocks, such as union closed shops, to entry for new freelancers, leading to a surge in newcomers, especially straight from higher education colleges;
- the decline in union density and union bargaining power within the industry; and
- the lack of agreed and enforceable industry-wide or sub-sector-wide minimum freelance rates.

These factors had depressed the level and value of fees available to most freelancers. Hourly, weekly and piece rates for jobs had been frozen, or increased only marginally, over time. Operations had intensified, deadlines had shortened and pay differentials between specialist grades had narrowed. In the publishing sub-sector, for instance, the editorial director of a publishing house described how the range of fees available to editorial freelancers had been compressed, leading to less lucrative pay scales at the upper end:

"... the band of rates of pay among editorial freelancers is narrowing. And it's not, it's not... It's going up more at the lower end of the scale. So it's moving a little at the upper end of the scale but it's catching up at the lower end of the scale. And it's a really quite a narrow band. And I think it's an interesting predicament for people in the industry who are contemplating or leading a freelance life: that you can earn a hundred pounds a day fairly quickly, but you have to look very hard and be very good and very persistent to find someone who will pay you more than a hundred and twenty pounds a day."

Editorial director, publishing house.

Employers felt they had only limited discretion in setting rates for freelancers. They had to be seen to be prudent with money and to get the most out of their limited resources. If a client had stipulated a maximum rate for a task, the employer felt duty bound to oblige. Where freelance rate cards, or fee scales, existed, employers were prepared go above them, but generally not by much. More money for one freelancer tended to mean either less for others or the need for savings to be found from other quarters.

Employers needed to keep costs down; to employ labour which provided them with the best value for money; and to attract freelancers who were driven by the demands of the assignment. There were often ceilings above which employers simply could not budge, even if the freelancer fell into the 'celebrity' category. As one employer said:

"... generally, if someone's rates are too high, we won't use them... .. At the end of the day, I mean, you know, fifty quid here or there, we'll talk about it, kind of thing. If someone says: 'I only work for a thousand pounds for a thousand words', then we just can't afford to use them."

Editorial director, contract magazine publisher.

To summarise, the employers who co-operated with this research faced multiple pressures from a variety of sources. They needed to control costs, maintain quality output and meet stringent

deadlines and contractual obligations. Freelance labour could help them achieve this but there were inherent risks. Employers minimised these by relying on informal networks to locate talent and, in so doing, vetting potential candidates in advance. Employers were looking for synchronicity and shared values between themselves and their freelancers, and a willingness to meet the challenges of the task.

5.8. The supply of freelance labour

In the main, employers felt in a strong position to dictate terms and conditions. In the new media sector, the managing director of a recruitment agency interviewed for this research spoke of the:

"... huge number of freelance IT people. I mean, oh I don't know, hundreds of thousands in the UK, I would say... it's a huge market. And we have 110 working at any one point in time. So, yeah, I mean there's a lot more of them around than there are necessarily jobs..."

In the broadcasting industry, key informants reported a large over-supply of freelancers in many specialisms. This is supported by other sources. Estimates of numbers of media graduates leaving UK universities each year during the 1990s varied from 10,000 (Spence, 1999) to 30,000 (Ursell, 2000). A recent newspaper article reported that there were now 331 undergraduate courses offering substantial course components in journalism (Hann, 2001). The effect, according to McKinlay, was *"...an overstocked and constantly replenished..."* pool of media workers (McKinlay and Quinn, 1999, p. 15). Young and inexperienced freelancers were prepared to work for next to nothing in order to establish a presence in the industry. The television production industry acted, metaphorically, as the insatiable:

"... vampire, ingesting youngsters at low prices from a large pool provided by the education system, working newcomers and established hands remorselessly, and discarding the older and less accommodating at will."

(Ursell, 2000, p. 816)

There were advantages to having relatively 'raw' talent. Employers interviewed for this research needed bright, willing and uncomplaining individuals prepared to adapt to the needs of their organisations. This made younger freelancers appear particularly attractive, as one employer explained:

"... we often work with people who are relatively inexperienced, maybe one or two years experience... We like working with such people because they won't have learned bad habits from other publishers. And usually they are keen and they're willing to be flexible and often to do quite routine and boring things as well as the interesting parts of the job."

Editorial director, publishing house.

Freelancers who failed to adapt to the needs of the client were liable for a swift exodus. The owner of the news and photographic agency emphasised the importance of delivering precisely what the employer wanted, and in the right manner:

"...that's the whole key to freelancing... is relationships and building those relationships because there's a hundred freelances they could deal with probably for the same thing. The reason they deal with you is because you're amenable and agreeable and you can deliver what they want."

Owner, news & photographic agency.

The features editor of a national daily newspaper, who prided herself as establishing good relationships with the stable of freelancers mentioned in the last chapter, described freelancers as being "very, very sensible". Asked to elaborate, she replied that commissions were dependant on a productive working arrangement.

Interviewer: "... you're saying that freelances are too sensible – because?

Employer: "...well, they won't get their commissions again. You know, and there's a million people who want to do it. You know... and, you know, there's lots of good people out there. I mean, when I say that I can always think of one person

who'd be perfect, I can always think of somebody else who could do it, perhaps not quite as well, but with a bit of extra support..."

Features editor, national daily newspaper.

The talent manager of a television broadcaster, recently in post, had been alarmed at the way a senior member of staff had wanted to rid themselves of a freelancer instantly because they were deemed unsuitable, and would have preferred to have ended the relationship without discussion or warning but for her intervention.

5.9. The value of age and experience

At one level, older professionals would appear to have many of the attributes which employers said *they needed in their freelancers*. They were more likely to have a proven track record, a range of experience, a sound working knowledge of their specialism and an established informal network. They had worked in their media sub-sector for long enough to appreciate the infrastructure; to have been exposed to good practice; and to have acquired a certain level of professionalism.

On the whole, the employers interviewed for this study valued the experience that older freelancers could bring to assignments. They recognised that there were times when mature freelancers had the edge over their younger counterparts, *perhaps due to a broader understanding of the issues, a better range of contacts, or a more sophisticated grasp of what was required*. Life experience and *"a really brilliant track record"* were seen as essential prerequisites by the development head of an independent broadcasting company when searching for documentary programme directors. Likewise, the specialist editor of a national daily newspaper preferred older journalists for their experience and thoroughness.

"... the older ones are all the best. They're... all these women I'm talking about are at least in their 40s and most of them are in their 50s. And they're good because they're so experienced. The young ones, they can't hack it. They don't put the work in. They think, you know, two hours of calls one morning is enough.... And it isn't, it isn't. Not to get behind the skin of a subject. So you get these youngsters sending 'on spec' things in which, you

know, I could write in 15 minutes frankly with one phone call. And I can tell something that takes one phone call... 15 minutes. I know how long it takes me to do a good piece of research that's worth reading in a broadsheet paper... .. And so the older people... of course, they're just more... they're better disciplined. They've experienced more so, you know, they've got a wider amount of stuff to draw from. So the piece feels richer."

Specialist editor, national daily newspaper.

This editor saw her older freelancers as sharing her professional standards. She was herself of this age group and felt comfortable with their ways of working. The women she refers to in the quoted passage were her "stable" of reliable, trusted freelancers, mentioned earlier in the chapter. She said she nurtured them in a number of ways: by offering them fairly regular assignments, by handling their work with respect, and by encouraging them to deliver quality work.

An alternative picture emerges, however, in a growing body of academic and journalistic output on media employment conditions. In a study of employment patterns in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), managers were found to have systematically targeted older workers for early exit from the early 1980s onwards (Platman, 1995, Platman and Tinker, 1998). Equal opportunities policies at the Corporation had concentrated on gender, ethnic minorities and disability, with age as the last concern, confirming the 'hierarchy of oppressions' found in other research (Itzin and Phillipson, 1993). Platman's research (1998) identified a youth culture inside the Corporation which had discouraged the retention and the recruitment of older staff.

A number of freelance journalists interviewed for Baines's study of working conditions in the industry hinted at their being victims of age discrimination in the allocation of assignments (Baines, 2000). Further evidence is provided by personal, anecdotal accounts of journalists writing in magazines and newspapers (e.g. Ehrlich, 1999, Neustatter, 1999). Media professionals saw themselves and/or their colleagues as unfairly tarnished by a sin they had committed inadvertently – that of ageing visibly in a youth-dominated industry.

A class-action lawsuit filed in California in October 2000, alleging age bias among Hollywood studios, television networks, production companies and talent agencies, led to a series of features

about age discriminatory practices (Brownfield, 2000, Girion, 2000, Brownfield, 2001, Shayne, 2001). Even the most respected and feted writers could find themselves excluded from lucrative work. The U.S. media industry was said to have practised a systematic age bias against older freelancers. One writer for films and TV felt he had been blacklisted for no reason other than his lengthy experience, track record and advancing years (Shayne, 2001).

Older workers were also seen as disadvantaged in the electronic arts sector (Gill and Dodd, 2000). This was due to the sub-sector's young, vibrant and dynamic image; its demand for current IT skills; and its media products which were targeted mainly at youth. Age was perceived by survey participants (median age 28) as a far greater barrier than gender, ethnicity or disability (Gill, 2001).

The media industry made few, if any, concessions to groups of freelancers who could be seen as disadvantaged in the labour force. The pressures to complete assignments could be intense and unrelenting, and the hours, long and unpredictable. No sooner had one piece of freelance work finished than the next could be due. A project might require total dedication, to the exclusion of almost all else. Freelancers were expected to deliver the work whatever their own circumstances or needs.

In television production, hours were long, budgets decreasing and time pressures rising (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999). It could be hard to take time off for illness or family needs.

The owner of a news and photographic agency, interviewed for this research, believed that successful freelance writers and photographers had to be prepared to work all night, all weekend and seven days a week.

"Basically, you know, it's a treadmill. You know, as soon as you file copy, you need to get onto the next job... So, either you're prepared to get on that treadmill and make it work or you're not. And when you reach your 50s, are you really prepared to just keep filing and filing and filing and filing, or do you want to find something more rewarding or more (pause)

or something that has, you know, more stability to it? But I think that's the big problem: that, er, you just become disenchanting."

Owner, news and photographic agency.

In the broadcasting sector, certain freelance jobs could be equally arduous.

"... television and film production is typically long hours, not particularly comfortable working and... if you're actually talking about the craft grades, people actually out on location doing work, it's long hours. It's early starts, late finishes. It's six-day working very often. And frankly, I think, if you're 50 and you don't have to do it, you tend to find a way not to do it. I think there's a large element of that. It's quite hard, arduous work."

Trade association official, broadcasting sector.

It helped to have a robust constitution and to accept such intense, unpredictable working with alacrity. There were no special measures or schemes which permitted freelancers a less exhausting or more family-friendly schedule. It also helped to have an enthusiastic and open-minded attitude to the project or brief. Employers interviewed for this research were wary of seasoned professionals who brought 'baggage' with them, in the form of set ways of working or out-dated attitudes.

Of course, older freelancers could be equally adaptable if they so chose, and the employers recognised that inflexibility was not necessarily a product of age. But they were alert to signs which marked out the prospective freelancer as a relic of another era. One example, cited by a broadcasting employer, was the experienced director used to larger programme budgets and longer 'lead' times than was the case today. Employers expected freelancers to 'fit in' and to share their 'vision'. They were cautious of entrusting work to individuals who might find their methods questionable or alien. They needed to identify any mismatches or tensions in advance. Budgets had dwindled, technology had advanced and customers had become more demanding. The pressures of modern media management were such that employers couldn't risk intransigence or rigidity from their freelancers.

Employers were suspicious of individuals who remained in relatively junior freelance grades as they aged. The expectation was that those with talent would rise through the ranks over time: the more talented the individual, the faster the ascent. The owner of a production services agency in the broadcasting sub-sector saw this as particularly disadvantageous to older freelances.

"It's an industry that tends not to forgive people for standing still in their role. So, if you work in one grade for a lot of years, rather than people thinking, 'Well, you must be really super at it because you've got 15 years experience of, I don't know, production managing', it's quite likely they going to say, 'Well, you know, you're obviously a dinosaur. You're obviously fossilised. You obviously have no imagination, no drive, or you wouldn't have been doing it for the last 15 years. You'd have moved on and done something else.'... ... there's no production grade that you could mention where this wouldn't be the case... ... If you're still 26 and a researcher, people will be wondering why. If you're 32 and still an assistant producer or associate producer, people will start wondering why. Why haven't you become a producer-director... ... I think some time around the early 40s, the same question comes up. Why aren't they a series producer. Why aren't they an executive producer. And in order to guarantee a long-term career, you actually have to be seen to be moving up a career ladder. And yet it's an industry that doesn't have a very clear career ladder... where promotions happen by serendipity more than by planning. So I think all of that means that as you get older as a freelance then it's harder."

Owner, production services agency.

In certain creative occupations, the expectation was that the talented professional with initiative and flair aged 40 plus would be running his or her own business employing others, not freelancing as a sole trader. The creative director of a design agency felt there was something unusual about design contractors aged in their 50s who were still operating as solo contractors.

"I'd like to think that we wouldn't actively (be) prejudiced against someone who clearly was, you know, (a) fifty-plus years-old designer. But I don't think they'd tend to be - if they were

that good they've probably got their own design practice by then. So you wouldn't really see them."

Creative director, design agency.

Neither did he feel it appropriate for the older designer to be engaged in creating products for youth markets. He associated himself with this same generation to make his point:

"I wouldn't think it was appropriate for someone in their fifties to be designing new media for kids. I'd question how connected they were. I'd question how connected I am at my age. So it's not a prejudice. It's a prejudice I think I'm part of. I'm prejudiced against myself now for a lot of areas."

Creative director, design agency.

5.10. Summary

On the one hand, then, the media industry held out the prospect of a viable freelance career for older professionals. It was an expanding sector where freelance working was common and, in some instances, the norm. Experienced workers with sought-after skills and good contacts could find themselves in demand and able to ask for lucrative fees. Yet, in other ways, the prevailing freelance culture devalued experience and jeopardised freelance survival in later life. Employers expected their freelancers to charge no more (or little more) than the market rate, irrespective of the length of time they had spent in the industry. They also expected 'portfolio' freelancers - who were working for several clients simultaneously - to equip themselves with the latest knowledge and skills, usually at no cost to the employer.

Due to pressures of time, budgets and competition, employers relied on their own informal networks to recruit freelance talent. This favoured 'known' quantities who could deliver the 'right' kind of product. Employers were wary of 'same old, same olds' or people with dated expectations and intransigent attitudes. Some sub-sectors, such as broadcasting and new media, appeared to be age stratified in the way that certain positions were reserved for people of a certain age. The

large supply of freelancers in the industry, especially of new entrants in their 20s, meant that, for the most part, employers felt in a strong position to dictate terms and conditions. Pay rates had been depressed for all but the 'star turns' and specialists in short supply. Meanwhile, freelancers could expect little in the way of special concessions should they wish to reduce their workload or take a planned break.

CHAPTER 6

THE FREELANCER'S PERSPECTIVE

6.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the views, perceptions and stories of individuals who have experienced freelancing first hand. Of particular concern are, firstly, the attractions of freelancing; secondly, the degree of control and choice which individuals feel they have over their working lives; thirdly, the uncertainties and risks involved in a freelance career; and fourthly, the potential and actual blocks to a viable freelance career in later life.

The first chapter section, Section 6.2., describes an important facet of freelance life and of this research: that of diversity, both in freelance operations and among those interviewees who took part in the study.

Section 6.3. examines the draws to a freelance career. A surprising feature of interviews with freelancers – including freelancers who had yet to embark on their freelance enterprise as well as those on the brink of departure – was the belief that formal retirement at 60 or 65 was an irrelevance. A near-universal ambition was the ability to perpetuate creative and fulfilling project-based work to the age of choice.

Section 6.4. asks how individuals manage to sustain their freelance careers over time. I examine in detail the way they adapt their skills to their clients and their specialist markets. In so doing, I explore the way freelancers negotiate deadlines, fees and reputations in order to remain flexible and sought-after.

Section 6.5. investigates the insecurities of freelance working, focusing, firstly, on termination as an inherent feature of freelancing and, secondly, on the difficulties of planning ahead. I explore the dangers of provoking dissent and conflict, and freelancers' limited recourse to formal support systems.

Section 6.6. begins with the attractions of freelancing in later life and then counter-balances this with the disincentives. The section relies, in the main, on evidence from the 14 freelance interviewees who were aged 50 and over. Older freelancers, it is suggested, faced a number of potential checks or obstacles to the maintenance of a viable freelance career.

The chapter includes two case studies of individuals in order to illustrate, in greater detail, the attractions and challenges of freelancing. Both cases - of older male freelancers in the newspaper and the broadcasting sub-sectors - highlight the challenges of sustaining a freelance career in later life. (See Boxes 6.1., 6.2. and 6.3.. See also Appendix 06 for a key to excerpts used in this chapter.)

6.2. Freelance diversity

The freelancers interviewed for this study were consulting, advising, writing, producing, researching, illustrating, designing, developing, managing and editing. As detailed in Appendix 05, *the nature of their work differed enormously, not only between individuals but among individuals over time.* One freelancer might be employed continuously on a short-term contract lasting several weeks or months, to be followed by another contract for the same employer. Another freelancer might combine a part-time employee position with a series of one-off assignments for a number of different clients. Individuals might work for only one employer during any one week or several employers during any one day. They might receive some income via their own one-person business and other income as an employee with tax deducted at source. Freelancers were invoicing employers, agencies or other freelancers who had secured the commission. Fees varied by the hour, day, week or according to a set rate for the project. The permutations appeared to be endless. Each freelancer seemed to have a unique pattern of employment and this varied from day to day and year on year.

The freelancers interviewed for this research, then, were marked by diversity. Such was the singular nature of their employment that freelancers working in similar occupations in the same media sub-sectors had work histories which were entirely different. In terms of their clients, assignments, contract types and payment methods, no two freelancers were alike.

In addition, the group of freelancers involved in this study were demographically mixed (see Appendix 05 for a detailed profile of freelance interviewees). As Table 6.1. below shows, the gender mix was roughly equal (15 men, 14 women).

Table 6.1. Freelance interviewees by age and gender			
<i>Numbers in age group by gender</i>			
Age group	Men	Women	Totals
20-29	1	1	2
30-39	3	2	5
40-49	3	5	8
50-59	5	6	11
60-69	3	0	3
Totals	15	14	29

More than half had children. The ages of the group ranged from 27 years to 67 years, but the majority was aged 40 years and over (n. 22). Fourteen of these older freelancers were aged 50 and over.

The number of years individuals had been freelancing varied widely, from those about to start to those who had been operating for more than 20 years. (See Table 6.2. below.)

Table 6.2. Freelance interviewees by years freelancing and gender			
<i>Numbers by gender</i>			
Years freelancing	Men	Women	Totals
0-5 yrs	8	4	12
6-10 yrs	3	4	7
11-20 yrs	2	4	6
20+ yrs	2	2	4
Totals	15	14	29

These freelancers were located in the three media sub-sectors of, firstly, publishing (newspapers, magazines and books); secondly, broadcasting (radio and television); and thirdly, new media

production and design. (See Appendix 05 for a media sub-sector breakdown of freelance informants, especially Tables 05.1. and 05.3..) The findings reported in this chapter also draw on interviews with seven key informants and employers who had been, or were also, freelancers. Their presence further extended the variety of backgrounds and experiences which informed the research.

In constructing this chapter, it had seemed sensible to begin with a sequential description of the process of freelancing. One obvious source for this was the interview schedule (Appendix 03), which contained a loose chronological order, starting with the drivers for and expectations of freelancers; the day-to-day management of freelancing; support systems; and ending with freelance exit. Two early sketches of a chapter outline (dated 21.03.2001) contained a logical and orderly design, and included the following: timing of work; pace of work; balance of work; flow of work; quantity of work; source of work. Yet, as the analysis proceeded, it became clear that such a chronology was problematic. Freelancing was a fragmented and idiosyncratic process. Given the study's highly diverse group of informants, such a linear framework seemed an artificial and misplaced construct. Such a structure might have eased the task of presenting a large amount of data, but it would have misrepresented the essence of freelancing by suggesting order, phases and/or typologies which, to my mind, did not exist.

The aim of this study was to search for common themes and striking features in the freelance relationship which would shed light on the viability of this form of flexible employment for older workers. If this chapter was to achieve such an aim, a different approach was needed, one which acknowledged the complexities of the freelance relationship between individuals and employers. The structure which has emerged – which evolved over several drafts – is an attempt to understand the highly variable day-to-day operations of freelancers in order to detect *“the persistent relations between individuals... and the products of such relations...”*, to quote Bhaskar's philosophical analysis of the essential components of society (Bhaskar, 1979, p. 36).

The four main sections which follow include references to many of the facets which a chronological ordering would have embraced, such as the search for work, negotiations over rates of pay and the delivery of output. But they are presented here as illustrations of a more fundamental feature of freelancing: the practical, conditional and perpetual process of negotiation with clients.

6.3. The attractions of freelancing

This first section examines the draws to freelancing and, particularly, the attractions of this form of work for individuals in their 50s and over.

6.3.1. Motives for freelancing

Interviewees in the sample had become freelancers for a great many reasons: they had lost jobs, seen their own small businesses collapse, or been unable to find permanent work of the right sort. Freelancing held out the hope – at the time of the decision to go freelance at least – of a new beginning. This fresh start meant they escaped unemployment or the pressures of full-time corporate life. Or they could combine work with other interests or responsibilities, such as parenthood. Undoubtedly, the ‘free’ element of freelancing conjured an image of liberty, choice and individuality. These were powerful drivers for a group of creative media professionals who, until the moment of embarkation, had experienced a degree of heavy-handed corporate control. This took many forms within the study group:

- 1) A protracted redundancy;
- 2) An instant sacking;
- 3) The feeling that their experience or track record had been devalued under a new corporate regime;
- 4) An overly-narrow and frustrating in-house job;
- 5) The inability to secure an employee position as a new entrant to the industry or to that particular specialism or media sub-sector.

Individuals had felt excluded, then, in one way or another from permanent and/or fulfilling jobs with employers.

Among the older interviewees, freelancing represented an important means of survival in the labour market. Many had found themselves ejected, whether by choice or compulsion, from full-time and established positions in large media organisations whilst still in their 40s and early 50s. They had neither the will nor the means to exit the labour market permanently. They had often proved

themselves to be highly productive and talented individuals, with many credits and plaudits to testify to their successes. Not only did they wish to continue to work, but needed to for financial reasons. Those with reasonably generous occupational pensions saw freelance earnings as supplementing their income in order to sustain their existing lifestyle. The majority of freelancers interviewed for this study, however, felt they had no decent pension entitlements to speak of, and freelance earnings in these instances meant a survival lifeline. At no time in the future could they see themselves retiring in comfort financially.

Freelancing, then, was the preferred solution to a range of employment difficulties such as financial insolvency, corporate frustration and blocks to creative paid work. These were, in effect, 'repellent' factors that drove individuals to seek a freelance career. As Table 6.3. on the next page shows, there were also 'magnetic' factors pulling people towards freelancing.

For those freelancers in their 40s and over who were leaving a permanent, full-time position with a high profile and prestigious media employer, the prospects as a freelancer looked especially promising. Individuals had experience, contacts and an understanding of the workings of the industry. A producer-director who had been in his early 50s when he took redundancy from a large independent television broadcaster said:

"...people used to say when I left ... 'Oh you'll be all right,' you know. 'You've made all these great programmes, you've written these books. You're not worried,' and 'People will be falling over (themselves)'..."

Freelance producer-director & author.

Being in the media industry was seen as particularly advantageous for these professionals. Here was a sector with an established freelance tradition and thus a ready market for their substantial skills and experience. As a former female employee producer, who had taken redundancy in her mid-40s from a large broadcasting production house, said:

"I've got a friend who was in the city. He was made redundant. He's found it really difficult to get work, because what do you do if you're a redundant banker? Whereas a redundant

television producer becomes a freelance producer and, in fact, I think we're very lucky. You know, you can... as long as you're reasonably good... you can keep going for quite a lot longer."

Executive producer, television.

Table 6.3. below lists the many attractions of freelancing. As well as the income, there were expectations of varied and stimulating creative assignments; new opportunities in different sectors or allied specialisms; and a degree of flexibility and autonomy over the nature, location and timing of the work. See also Box 6.1. for the case study of an older professional who used freelancing to circumvent organisational barriers to his employment, post-retirement.

Table 6.3. The Draw of Freelancing for Workers	
Why interviewees had been attracted to a freelance career	
Repellent factors	Magnetic factors
<i>Freelancing meant a reprieve from...</i>	<i>Freelancing promised to deliver...</i>
Unemployment	An income
Enforced redundancy	Stimulating & varied assignments
Compulsory retirement	Control over the nature, location & timing of work
An instant sacking	A way to diversify & acquire new skills
An enforced resignation	Flexibility, in order to juggle work and other interests/responsibilities
Corporate bureaucracy	Free, discretionary time
A hostile management regime	Independence and autonomy
A stifling in-house job	New opportunities, for instance in a different company, sector or specialism
Blocks to a new job or promotion	A mechanism by which to 'wind down' slowly
The lack of full-time, staff jobs	A way to supplement a pension
A failed business enterprise	

television producer becomes a freelance producer and, in fact, I think we're very lucky. You know, you can... as long as you're reasonably good... you can keep going for quite a lot longer."

Executive producer, television.

Table 6.3. below lists the many attractions of freelancing. As well as the income, there were expectations of varied and stimulating creative assignments; new opportunities in different sectors or allied specialisms; and a degree of flexibility and autonomy over the nature, location and timing of the work. See also Box 6.1. for the case study of an older professional who used freelancing to circumvent organisational barriers to his employment, post-retirement.

Table 6.3. The Draw of Freelancing for Workers	
<i>Why interviewees had been attracted to a freelance career</i>	
Repellent factors	Magnetic factors
<i>Freelancing meant a reprieve from...</i>	<i>Freelancing promised to deliver...</i>
Unemployment	An income
Enforced redundancy	Stimulating & varied assignments
Compulsory retirement	Control over the nature, location & timing of work
An instant sacking	A way to diversify & acquire new skills
An enforced resignation	Flexibility, in order to juggle work and other interests/responsibilities
Corporate bureaucracy	Free, discretionary time
A hostile management regime	Independence and autonomy
A stifling in-house job	New opportunities, for instance in a different company, sector or specialism
Blocks to a new job or promotion	A mechanism by which to 'wind down' slowly
The lack of full-time, staff jobs	A way to supplement a pension
A failed business enterprise	

Box 6.1. The case study of a freelance photographer: breaching structural barriers

One of the research participants, a freelance photographer, is described here in detail for a number of reasons. Firstly, he represents an unusual case: he was the only freelancer in the sample to have remained in full-time work as an employee until the age of 65 years. Secondly, he was able to recreate vividly the final stage of his in-house employment and the early stage of his freelance career. It was as though this had happened yesterday. Thirdly, his case appears to support the idea that freelancing represented a viable and attractive work option in later life.

The photographer had worked for a national daily newspaper as a member of staff for most of his working life and had wanted to continue with the company until well past the age of 65 years. His employer was adamant, however, that he must retire. The following passages, taken from an interview with him more than two years after his retirement, reveals his disappointment at being forced to exit. More significantly, later extracts reveal the way he used freelancing to circumvent the company 'rules'.

The timing and manner of his enforced exit had felt coldly calculating after so many years of loyal and professional service. (His date of birthday has been changed to preserve anonymity.)

Freelancer: Dead on the dot you know. Called in to the managing editor's office about two weeks or three weeks prior and he said, 'Well, the time is up in three weeks time.' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'You've got to go. Your birthday is March the 6th and March the 6th you'll have to leave.' And I said, 'You're joking!' And I said, 'I just want to stay and carry on working.' He said, 'No you can't.'

He had hoped the moment of enforced retirement would not come. He had 'kept his head down' in the hope that no-one would notice his advancing age.

Interviewer: So when you were brought into the managing director's and he said, 'Right, you know, you've got three weeks'...

Freelancer: You've got to go. Yes.

Interviewer: Did you think... You knew that was going to happen did you?

Freelancer: I didn't think they would - I thought they'd be - I didn't realise that they would know that it was my birthday coming up. But it's all on computers isn't it? (Laughs.) Chuh-chung, chuh-chung!

Interviewer: Did you hope you'd slip through the net?

Freelancer: I thought I might slip through the net, you know. But not realising that the computers would be -

Interviewer: ... Flashing!

Freelancer: Duh-de-duh-duh! (Singsongy.)

Interviewer: So you were hoping perhaps they'd make an exception?

Freelancer: I thought they would.

Interviewer: Why did you think that?

Freelancer: Well I was a friend of (the owner).... I used to do all (the owner's) private work for him and ... And we were all on first name terms and I thought that I was so well in. See, there's no such thing as being so well in. That I'd be able to carry on.

His show of surprise and indignation at being forced to retire carried little weight. Neither did his letters to the owner of the newspaper and a senior manager.

Freelancer: Well, you see, I thought I was indispensable. I really didn't think they could run the (newspaper) without me being... (laughs).

Interviewer: Is this genuine? Or are you -?

Freelancer: No, oh well obviously - I just loved... I think I'm perhaps the only bloke in Fleet Street that loves his work and there's everyone who says, 'Here, when will you retire you know?' 'Well, sixty five I suppose.' And people would be saying, 'Well I'm going to retire when I get to fifty or fifty five, can't wait to get out.' I'd say, 'Well I, what do you mean you can't wait to get out?' Most people are like that in Fleet Street. Can't wait to get out. And I didn't want to get out. Yeah, I did enjoy my work...

...Freelancing under these circumstances represented a means by which he could remain loyal to, and gainfully employed by, his previous employer. It was the pragmatic answer to enforced exit at the age of 65. However, securing this freelance lifeline involved him demanding special favours, in the form of a re-instated security pass into the building and, more importantly, permission to retain his camera equipment. Both were hard-earned privileges, bestowed after vociferous pressures and shows of indignation during the run-up to his retirement date.

Interviewer: At what point did you decide, 'Right, I'm going to freelance'?

Freelancer: Well, when I realised that I really was out on my ear. Oh then, they said - yes, that's right, the managing editor... 'And of course you have to hand in your cameras.' I said, 'What do you mean hand my cameras in?' He said, 'Well, yes. Yes. They're worth a lot of money' ... I said, 'I'm not handing my cameras in.' He said, 'You have to.' I said, 'I'm not! ... I'm telling you this, I'm not handing my equipment in.' [The photographer demands to see the editor, argues his case and wins the concession.] The next day he said, 'Okay.' I can keep my cameras. Well, for goodness sake, you know. I said, 'Well, you know, I want, if I'm going to be out as the staff person,' I said, 'I will then want to freelance and freelance, you know, I'll need my cameras.'

Finally, his freelance career with his former employer got underway:

"Anyway, I had a couple of weeks break then they started phoning me up, you know. Can you do this, that and the other and so I was back in business."

Initially at least, freelancing proved a boon. He was earning, in his words, "a tidy fortune" and being treated as an experienced and valued worker.

Freelancer: Because I said to them (his former employer), I said, 'Look I shall come back to freelance but I'm not going to be like your little twenty year old freelancers who go in at ten o'clock and sit around and do work you know or not do work until say seven o'clock at night. And then go home.' I said, 'I'm not going to be like that.' I said, 'I'll come in and do the special jobs which might only take an hour, might take all day but, you know.' So I said, 'I'm not wasting my time you know. Doing things that I wouldn't have done when I was on the staff.'

And he said, 'Yeah, sure.' So it would kind of work out quite well. They'd say, 'Well, would you mind? Would you mind?' It was always, 'Would you mind?' You know, doing so and so for us. So, help us out, you know, do this particular job. I said, 'Sure, you know, if it's convenient, you know. I've got to look in my diary.'

Within a short space of time, then, freelancing afforded him financial security, creative fulfilment and a measure of discretion and control over the timing and nature of his photographic assignments. This ideal state was not to last, though, as shall be detailed in Box 6.3., in the later Section 6.6., Freelancing in later life, of this chapter.

6.3.2. The future appeal of freelancing¹

Without exception, the freelancers interviewed for this study were not contemplating retirement in the traditional sense: as a sharp withdrawal from paid work at 60 or 65 years of age. It was surprising to find such consensus between men and women of all ages and across media sub-sectors. Two main reasons were given for this expectation of an open-ended attachment to the labour market: insufficient retirement income and the satisfaction derived from creative endeavours. The following paragraphs deal with these in turn.

6.3.2.1. Finances

Only two of the freelancers, both men in their 60s, had an occupational pension which they saw as sufficient for their needs. The remainder had either no occupational pension, or what they deemed as an inadequate occupational or personal pension scheme. Their freelance status at the time of the interview meant, by default, that they had no access to a company pension scheme. The general expectation was that they would have to fend for themselves in providing for a comfortable living now and in the future. Unlike workplaces where an early retirement package was an established tradition or right after substantial years of continuous service, these individuals worked in a self-employment culture where there were no equivalent customs or protective provisions.

6.3.2.2. Satisfaction

Of equal importance in the future appeal of freelancing was the sense of self-esteem and satisfaction derived from working on creative projects. At its most extreme, work and self were seen as indivisible: creativity was part of, or an extension of, the individual. It was hard for freelancers who promoted this view of their work to contemplate a life devoid of paid employment.

¹ Questions about retirement tended to feature towards the end of the face-to-face interviews. They were a block of five prompts representing the final major chunk of the interview schedule. (See Appendix 03.) The questions were rarely asked in order or as a complete set of questions. The answers were, of course, hypothetical, since even those who had officially retired were, at the time of the interviews, working freelancers.

An illustrator and designer who had been freelancing for 23 years said she could not imagine a time when she would retire. The following, brief passage sums up her drive to perpetuate her freelance lifestyle:

Freelancer: And I will never stop working. Well, I couldn't afford to. I've only got a miserable pension you know. I've never had a pension from anywhere. So... and I'd never want to, anyway. Although I can imagine quite wanting to do some things for myself that aren't going to sell. But then I could always do something that sells as well, I suppose. So I shall carry on until I drop, I'm sure. (Laughs)... ..

Interviewer: Whatever age...

Freelancer: Yes. Partly because I like it and also out of necessity. But it's very much my... it's what I am, my work. It's not something I just do for the money, although I've got to do it for the money. I mean, I need the money. But it's so much me. I couldn't possibly imagine not sitting upstairs and working. No, I just... it's something I like doing. And want to do it...

Freelancer, aged 52.

Freelancing was also the way in which people hoped to extend their portfolio of skills and interests. Often, this was made possible through an unexpected challenge: a sudden assignment abroad; a new piece of technology to develop and apply; an event to stage manage; or a book to re-write. These assignments usually entailed tight deadlines and limited budgets, but freelancers spoke with pride about the moment of satisfactory delivery. They had welcomed the chance to be tested on the one hand and to diversify on the other.

It was noticeable from the interviews, including from the quoted passage from the freelance illustrator and author above, that these two reasons for wanting to continue freelancing - insufficient retirement income and the satisfaction derived from creative endeavours - were often bundled into one during discussions. Rarely, if ever, was it an 'either or':— that retirement at a fixed age was unpalatable either because it meant an intolerable drop in income or in job-related satisfaction. Rather, the enjoyment derived from fulfilling assignments had led individuals to contemplate an indefinite extension to this form of paid work. Had the work simply meant 'more money' and 'no

work satisfaction', then it would have proved a far less attractive option. Conversely, if the assignments had meant 'no money' but 'some work satisfaction', then there was no point carrying on as a professional freelancer. Financial and creative rewards were inextricably linked.

Although none expected to take an orthodox retirement route, the customised alternative was always conditional. There were clear preferences and baselines for this final but indefinite phase of work. This is alluded to in the passage by the freelance illustrator and author overleaf: the idea that she might like to produce creative designs which were not necessarily 'money-spinners'.

Freelancers wanted to escape the drudge and concentrate on the choice assignments. This meant the ability to handpick or self-design projects and cast the remainder aside. In this way, freelancing represented a utopian state. Retirement meant not a static, unproductive and dependent phase, but a time when sufficient means might be available for individuals to enter, potentially, the most fulfilling stage of a working life. Jobs still involved payment, but the individual was free to say 'no' to the dross. They realised, of course, that they were free to say 'no' at any time, but the insecurities of freelancing meant this was a response of last resort.

This preference for choice assignments is illustrated well in the following passage taken from an interview with a publishing consultant, writer and editor:

*I think like most people, I would not want to be working one moment and, sort of, doing nothing the next... With the kind of work I'm doing..... I'm in a better position to, if I want to, to ease off gradually rather than, you know, go from total employment to total unemployment and I think that's probably true of most people, really. So, from that point of view, I think freelancing is.... makes retirement easier, or makes the transition easier...
... I think... my ideal way of retirement would be ... if I had sufficient pension provision to basically, to pick and choose what work I want to do for, sort of, personal satisfaction rather than purely to, to earn a living... And I think, certainly, if there is interesting work to be done that I can, you know, I'm suitably skilled to do, I would very happily go on, you know, working quite a way beyond that. And particularly, editing is something that if you're brain is still working and your eyes are still working and so on, there's no reason why you shouldn't go on doing it for a very long time ... So... so the answer is, you know, come aged 70, I would still hope to be doing some work, but I would not want to be working every*

minute of the day and I would ideally want to be doing the work that particularly appeals to me rather than a, sort of, more of a conveyor belt way of working.

Publishing consultant, writer & editor, aged 58.

It is worth including another extract, this time from a freelance web applications consultant and developer in the new media sector. At the time of the interview, he was around half the age of the publishing consultant mentioned above, and the youngest of the freelancers interviewed for this study. Yet he viewed retirement in uncannily similar ways:

Freelancer: ...I'm never going to be totally retired. But I like the idea... I'd like to get myself to a stage where I'm not forced to work. And so therefore, I will work if I want to...

Interviewer: ... on projects that interest you?

Freelancer: Yeah, exactly. Rather than just doing it because you have to and because it's the daily grind...

Freelance web applications consultant and developer, aged 27.

Freelancers were adamant that they would still have a great deal to give once they reached the age of 60 and above. They had spent varying lengths of time acquiring and developing skills, delivering innovative products and adapting their talents to the technological or management regimes of the moment. They resisted the idea of retirement as a time of withdrawal. Freelancing represented a way for them to remain connected, challenged and sought after. The comments of a media regulatory adviser and change consultant illustrate this point:

Freelancer: I don't think of retirement as such at all.

Interviewer: Because there won't be a time when you don't work?

Freelancer: There might be a time when I don't work if I have a stroke or I can't work, but there won't be a time when I don't work.

Interviewer: So when will you think...?

Freelancer: ... No, the very last thing I'd want to do is go on Saga trips and cruises and

all sorts of things, you know... I really don't want to do a lot of these things that older people do when they retire... it's the closing off that I think that I don't want. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yes, yes, the idea perhaps that you'd be isolated...

Freelancer: ... Less stimulated, I think. Not isolated. You wouldn't be isolated. Isolated intellectually perhaps, which is probably the most important thing. I like the range, to be constantly challenged and fed with ideas, and new thinking...

Media regulatory adviser and change consultant, aged 55.

Another freelancer felt her best work was still to come; others said they were brimming with ideas and better at their craft than they had ever been.

In summary, then, freelancing offered the means by which creative professionals hoped to extend their working lives for as long as they wished. It was also the instrument by which they could tailor-make the components of this final working phase. Their freelance 'ideal' was to select or assemble the projects of their choosing and alter the time commitment accordingly. With one exception², the research interviewees did not see the statutory retirement ages of 60 for women and 65 for men as the cut-off point for their creative employment and none was striving for the moment when he or she could stop work altogether. They recognised the financial realities of a premature exit from the labour market, and feared the creative frustration of a retirement without output of any kind. Work was seen as a fluid entity and an extension of themselves.

The means by which this could be sustained was freelancing. In theory, it represented choice, flexibility and control. Uniquely, this form of employment lacked the sanctions which could be applied to permanent members of staff: freelancers could not be sacked, made redundant or forced to take early or 'normal' retirement. They could choose their clients and, in addition, the project-based, time-limited and bounded nature of freelance assignments suggested a range of discrete pieces of work that could be fitted in to suit the individual. Finally, these assignments required mental agility and a willingness to adapt – rather than physical stamina, although this was

² This was a freelancer aged 46 at the time of the interview who was about to return to full-time employment as a permanent member of staff. He was the only interviewee who positively welcomed the idea of a traditional retirement as an end to work. He thought it unlikely, though, that he would be able to finance this. Nevertheless, it remained his ambition.

sometimes a bonus – and these attributes had been a feature of their working lives since the start of their employment.

6.4. Sustaining the freelance relationship

Interviewer: *"... what kind of freelancer do you have to be to survive?"*

Freelancer: *(Pause) "You have to be a very malleable freelancer... .. You need to be easy-going, not really willing to say, 'No'. Not willing to say, 'I don't think you're doing this the right way, I think you could do better another way'. Is there a polite way of putting it? Malleable, is the polite way of putting it."*

Interviewer: *"What's the impolite way of putting it?"*

Freelancer: *"Roll over backwards, you have to roll over backwards."*

Freelance editorial & marketing consultant, editor and writer.

A central research question in this study was about how freelancers were able to create and perpetuate a viable freelance career. A key concern was the way they managed, if at all, to control their freelance operations. By control, I am meaning here the ability to regulate, influence and sustain at will the quantity and quality of assignments.

The freelancer quoted above was an editorial and marketing consultant, aged 41, who had been freelancing for three years after a career as a staff editor on a national daily newspaper. He had once employed freelancers. Now a freelancer himself, he had become increasingly disillusioned with the way he had been treated. His blunt interpretation of the freelance position prompted me to ask a number of questions of the interview data as a whole. How far did freelancers have to bend and adapt to clients' wishes? Did they display the level of obedience or acquiescence suggested by this excerpt?

Studies of project-based working in the UK and US film industries had detailed the need to be highly motivated, persistent, competent and obliging in order to sustain a long-term freelance career (see especially Jones, 1996, Blair, 2001). Freelancers had to perform and deliver, so that their reputation and track record would attract future work.

This section, 6.4., explores this notion of 'malleability' further by examining two features of freelancing: customer focus and market focus. In the first sub-section on customer focus, we look at, firstly, the attitudes of freelancers to project delivery; secondly, the way they sought responses from clients about their completed work; and thirdly, the methods by which they negotiated their fees and other conditions. It will be seen that freelancers deployed highly sensitive and conscious methods in their day-to-day lives.

6.4.1. Customer focus

Three facets of customer focus are featured here: project delivery, feedback from clients, and the negotiation of terms and conditions. These were not the only ways in which freelancers demonstrated their ability and willingness to adapt to the needs of the client. But they were seen as examples which best illustrated this.

6.4.1.2. Project delivery

In the main, freelancers were prepared to go to great lengths to deliver exactly what the client requested at the specified time. They gave examples of meeting deadlines even when they were sick; working continuously for long stretches even when it could jeopardise their health; and delaying holidays to suit the client. There are parallels here with the flexibility and 'instant' solutions demanded by employers, and described in the previous chapter.

One woman freelancer, aged 59, had been prepared to work some of her weekends, despite having a young daughter to care for, in order to complete assignments. Recalling the time when she specialised in book reviews for a national newspaper, she said:

Freelancer: "They would ring you up on a Thursday afternoon and say, 'Can we have it on Monday if we bike it round to you now?' You know, so I – it was very often, you know, extremely inconvenient and I used to feel really pissed off. But I don't think I ever said 'No!'"

Interviewer: "Did you ever try to renegotiate?"

Freelancer: "Rarely. No, I think I always just did it."

Freelance feature writer & publisher's reader, editor & copywriter.

Another freelancer with caring commitments said she had "...never, never, never, never, never missed a deadline. (Laughs)" Aged 52, she had spent more than 20 years as a freelance illustrator and children's author. She was a mother of three children, with her youngest child aged nine, and a portfolio of clients in the publishing sub-sector. She had managed this reliability despite being the main carer of her children and often having multiple deadlines for rival projects.

No matter what the mitigating circumstances, freelancers were aware that a client's sympathies could be short-lived. The following freelancer believed in honouring the deadline irrespective of his own ill-health:

"... you've got to respect deadlines. And turn up. I mean, I work on the principle really that... (pause) I work on the fairly cynical principle that people are really not interested in your private life. They're not interested in your illnesses. They're not interested in your children's sports days and so on. They're interested in the job that they pay you to do. And that's probably cynical but that's... like recently, I had a deadline and I also had a pretty bad flu, actually. I was dragging myself around. But I did it..."

Freelance broadcaster, writer & communications consultant, aged 59.

A more extreme case of this dedication emerged during discussions with a freelance media regulatory adviser and change consultant, aged 55. In two separate interviews, 13 months apart, the freelancer offered contrasting stories which demonstrated her professionalism, dedication and client commitment. At the time of the first interview, her freelance portfolio involved a broad range of projects for a number of different organisations in contrasting industry sectors. She was active in the regulatory side of the media industry, and this meant she needed to know about media complaints, adjudications and legislation. However, she was also employed as a consultant in the housing sector and, in order to be effective in this role, she had to be familiar with housing policy,

legislation and government proposals. In addition, she was involved in a third area of work: mental health. She needed to be aware of the relevant policy and practice in this field, plus the allied areas of probation, police and social services. It was a complex and vast territory which this freelancer felt she had to master in order to deal effectively with her clients. Failure to keep abreast could lead to errors of judgement, a lack of empathy with the client and a loss of face in her ability to meet her own stringent targets. She felt there was no choice but to be conversant with all the relevant issues. Although problematic in terms of the time and effort involved, the freelancer did not regard this facet of her freelance life as optional. During the interview, she said she believed she “*had to mug up*”, had “*to know all the policy areas*” as well as “*all the major changes*”. It was complicated, involved a fast assimilation of knowledge and a genuine appreciation of an enormous range of policy, practice-based and legislative issues. But in order for her to understand the needs of her clients, and engage in a meaningful dialogue with key individuals, she needed this level of understanding. It is reminiscent, again, of the ‘instant’ knowledge expected of freelancers by employers, detailed in the last chapter.

By the time of the second interview more than a year later, she had accepted a contract to design, launch and develop a new health initiative. This had involved creating an interactive web site and organising a large-scale, high profile conference attended by health executives, practitioners, client groups and a Government minister. In the two months prior to the launch, she had been working “*...seven days a week and I’ve actually been up at half past three most mornings to get on, because, just the pressure of producing a launch like that, a huge thing, with almost nobody to help you.*”

However, she had felt that it had been her choice to design the initiative in the way she had. In that sense, the punishing work schedule had been self-imposed and the work immensely rewarding. More telling, though, was her interpretation of how this had affected her employment prospects:

“... it wasn’t clear until the launch, which was only 3 weeks ago, that I’ve made a, you know, an astonishing success of it. I mean it was really bubbling up slowly... .. and it came together on this day and suddenly it was clear what I’d done. And it... until that point, people were going, ‘What is it? What is going on here?’... .. And so it was suddenly, ‘But

you are staying aren't you, you mustn't leave now? You are... Because I said, 'Do you realise that my contract ends next month?'"

Freelance media regulatory adviser & change consultant.

Her relentless commitment to the task in hand had improved immeasurably her chances of securing a contract extension from the employing enterprise.

The project delivery examples described here are a yardstick of the commitment which freelancers were prepared to give in order to serve the client's interests. They were the ways in which freelancers demonstrated dedication to and interest in their work. An implicit by-product was the way this improved their chances of gaining a good reputation and, thus, further commissions.

6.4.1.2. Feedback from clients

Freelancers also demonstrated their adaptability in the way they sought responses from clients about their style, methods of working and output. It was the means by which they tested out their relations with commissioners. When such feedback was absent, freelancers said they found it hard, if not impossible, to gauge their standing within the organisation and the likely chances of them securing more work. At best, this feedback was an ongoing and informal exchange. Again, this is best exemplified by the freelance media regulatory adviser & change consultant featured extensively in the section on project delivery above. Her methods for seeking feedback were unusual among the freelance interviews for their sophistication, penetration and effectiveness. It had allowed her to test her approaches and style on individuals within her employing organisations, discuss ideas and proposals, and give her advanced warning of dissatisfaction. Her techniques operated at two main levels within the organisations she worked for: firstly, she had a mentor in each of her client organisations with whom she could talk *"freely and frankly"* about her performance; secondly, she was sounding out colleagues, superiors and subordinates on a continuous basis, *"constantly checking on their satisfaction"*. She summed this up as follows:

"...it's that kind of antennae, having your antennae out, that's really important..."

Freelance media regulatory adviser & change consultant.

A few days prior to the first research interview, the freelancer had facilitated a management away day involving a chief executive and four directors. Within three days, she had elicited informal responses from each of the participants.

"And it was a very, very difficult day. But I have, on Monday, I found the time to ring each of them to say, 'How satisfied were you with the day? What did you think went well? What did you think did not go so well? What would you like to see differently?' So I didn't say 'How was I doing?' But in effect... part of it, 'What could I do to help this go better next time?' was at the back of my mind."

Freelance media regulatory adviser & change consultant.

She tailored her approaches to fit the available circumstances. It could be an informal conversation in a corridor, or a telephone conversation or e-mail. She found a way, in each of her projects, to test out her approach. It was her way of adapting to the organisation, serving their needs and thus, indirectly, serving her own. However, her ability to 'tune in' to clients appeared to be unusual. Other freelancers involved in this study had said how hard it was, in general, to achieve anything like the degree of contact and feedback gained by this individual. It prompted me to ask of this freelancer:

Interviewer: "Can you see a situation where it would be impossible to ask for feedback?"

Freelancer: "No, there's always a way. It doesn't have to be formal: 'I'm ringing you to get feedback...' It doesn't have to be like that. But I think there's always a way to do it. It's different in different circumstances. But I think it's important. And it's particularly important if you're a freelancer. And actually you have to be proactive. People are nervous. They'll duck away from it. But actually, knowing how you're doing is a really important plank in doing better, organisationally and personally."

Freelance media regulatory adviser & change consultant.

It is important to emphasise that these techniques for gauging impact were not an afterthought by this freelancer but an intentional and core pursuit. She was conscious of the importance of sounding people out, but discreet in the way she did so.

Similar (although more diluted) approaches emerged during an interview with a woman of a similar age but in a different sub-sector. This freelance feature writer, publisher's reader, editor and copywriter, aged 59, realised she needed to cultivate friendly and reciprocal relations in order for the work to become a continuous stream:

Freelancer: "...a crucial part of the way I work is just being able to talk to people over the phone and things like that. So I think it's just, sort of, maintaining contact, you know. I suppose it's little things, you know, when you send something out... I mean, making sure anyway that you've fulfilled the commission that you've been given. And also always, sort of, checking back with people. And also trying to keep in touch with them in a kind of personal way, I suppose. I have tried to, from time to time, meet the people that I work for. I suppose I've actually just tried to build up a kind of personal relationship with them really, yes."

Interviewer: "... quite difficult because they must be so busy and you're just one of many freelancers."

Freelancer: "Yes, yes and I've found that where I can't do that, it doesn't work. You know, if I can't do that it falls off. Whereas in the situations where I can, then it sort of maintains it's kind of impetus and people give me more work and so on."

Freelance feature writer, publisher's reader, editor and copywriter.

Without this kind of relationship, freelancers were left in the dark as to how they were regarded by commissioners, both as individuals and as suppliers of the right kind of services or products. So important was this two-way dialogue that a media recruitment agency issued feedback forms to all its clients who had used its freelancers. The managing

director felt that their appraisal form was an important mechanism in retaining both freelancers and clients.

6.4.1.3. Negotiating fees and conditions

A third way in which freelancers demonstrated an ability to bend and adapt to the client was in the way fees and other conditions were negotiated. On the whole, individuals tended to be extremely cautious about the way they approached the subject of money with clients. Even those prepared to question set rates were sensitive to the constraints under which the client was operating.

Demanding more money was a potentially fraught and risky enterprise and the majority of the freelancers involved in this study simply accepted whatever was on offer, at least most of the time. There were occasions, however, when the fee was seen as so low that even the most reticent individual felt duty bound to ask for more. The way one freelancer, aged 52, described her fee-setting encounter is instructive. She admitted that she found negotiations over fees generally to be a difficult and worrying process, even after 23 years as a freelance illustrator and author.

"...I'm terrible on money. Terrible. I find it very, very difficult talking about money, which is pathetic, you know. After all these years of being freelance and I still find the money side the most terrible side ..."

Freelance illustrator & author.

During the interview, she gave an example of an occasion when she felt there had been no choice but to ask for a larger fee. She had been paid a £2,000 advance to design and illustrate a children's book. This had involved a great deal of meticulous fabric work which had been well received by the client and popular with readers. The publishing house had commissioned a second book, for the same advance. Her non-confrontational and tentative style of negotiation emerged during the recollection of the process:

"I was rather worried about it because they asked me to do another book and I thought, 'Well, I really do want to do another book, but I can't do it for £2,000. It's just not... it's ridiculous, you know, I'm just not you know...' I'm saying it's ridiculous. It's not that I

couldn't live on it, because I was doing other work anyway, so it wasn't as if I couldn't pay my bills if I didn't have more money, but I think... I just thought, as a point of, you know... I just thought it was outrageous that they should only give me that much money, really. So I wrote this long letter, sort of saying, 'I can't manage and it takes a lot of time and if I don't put the time into it, it's not going to look as nice anyway, so I can't cut any corners here and it's taking me ages and I really do feel I ought to have a bit more...' So, I said, 'I must have a bit more money. Can I have £3,000?'"

Freelance illustrator & author.

She was asked in the research interview why she had chosen to put her request in writing, rather than present it over the telephone or face-to-face. She explained that her main point of contact at the publishing house lived some distance away and it would have been time-consuming for this client to have convened a special meeting to discuss fees. But also, it had felt more comfortable to make her case in writing:

"... probably it's easier to say things in a letter, isn't it, than actually face-to-face or phoning, 'cause I had to... I'm not very good, as you can tell, with talking and I'm falling over myself and sort of back-tracking and sort of... and going all round the houses. So it was a letter that rambled on about, sort of, 'I'd love to do another book but I am... I do feel, with the time, I really can't do it... for that sort of money and I don't want to compromise the work because that won't do it any good and you can see the detail... Blah, blah, blah.'"

Freelance illustrator & author.

The freelancer had been hesitant about asking for more. She had wanted to undertake the commission. It was demanding but rewarding work. The publishing house specialised in high quality, beautifully illustrated hard back books. They tended to re-commission from regular authors and this had suggested to the freelancer that more work might be forthcoming. Confronting the client risked alienating her contact and severing a satisfying and productive working relationship.

But as her story unfolds, we discover that the client felt her request (and perhaps the manner in which she did so) to be entirely reasonable:

"... and I can't remember whether she (the employer) rang up or I just got another letter. I think I just got another letter saying, 'Yes, that's fine.' Straight away."

Freelance illustrator & author.

There was no need of a protracted period of negotiation. The client had immediately agreed to the freelancer's demands. There had been no hesitation, no provisos. The freelancer had achieved a 50% increase in her advance, seemingly without difficulty. But it had been a troubling time for the freelancer, who had taken care to pursue her case with caution. Of particular difficulty was her lack of knowledge over rates paid to other illustrators and over the profit margins enjoyed by the client on the production of each of her books.

It was noticeable that those freelancers prepared to argue systematically for higher fees tended to be men rather than woman. This is not to suggest that all of the men and none of the women adopted a more aggressive fees policy. There were many men who were prepared to leave fees unchallenged. The important point, though, is that even those men prepared to argue for improved remuneration did so with considerable tact and sensitivity. Two of the older male freelancers - a 59-year-old broadcaster, writer and communications consultant and a 58-year-old publishing consultant, writer and editor - both said they always charged as much as they thought they could get away with. But their claims were far from the rash and extravagant demands which one might suppose from such a statement. The phrase 'as much as they could get away with' was, in fact, based on a sensitive reading of the resources available to the client and their own relative value to the organisation. There was often room for negotiation, but the trick was to know how much room.

Even when the turnover of the client was well known, and sufficiently large to merit a request for a higher rate, the process of setting the fee was problematic. As well as uncertainties over rival bids (when they existed), it was also hard to estimate in advance exactly how much time was involved. Freelancers needed to charge out not only their overheads, but also the time involved in preparation, travel, meetings and delivery. It was often difficult to predict this until the project was well underway or, in some cases, completed. Renegotiating fees once the commission had been secured was an equally delicate operation, especially with new clients. A freelance publishing

consultant, writer and editor said it was common for his assignments to require more work than he had been led to believe, or he had expected from discussions with the client. But he was reticent to renegotiate when it involved a first assignment for an individual or organisation.

"...it's easier with people who you know well because, in a way, they'll trust that you're not simply trying to extort more money out of them. If it's a new client, you're very hesitant to do that because you think it may deter them from giving you more work... the fear that 'Oh, we've agreed one thing and now it's going to cost us so much.'"

Freelance publishing consultant, writer and editor.

This freelancer felt there were a number of occasions when the price was fixed, irrespective of the time involved. To have demanded more money might have jeopardised future work and undermined his long-term viability as a freelancer. He makes this point later on in the interview:

"...I need to make sure that I am providing a very good service to my main clients because they are, in a way, my best security for the future."

Freelance publishing consultant, writer and editor.

Only when the client was in desperate straits could the freelancer adopt a more cavalier approach. The head of multimedia at a design agency recalled the time when, as a freelancer some years earlier, he was able to lay down terms which were exceptional to the general practice within the employing company. He had approached a former client, a design agency, and found them in need of his skills:

"I phoned them up out of the blue and they just had a programmer in over the last three months and... .. he'd made a complete mess of the whole job. Client was expecting delivery in two weeks and the job was half finished and, as it turned out, it was actually full of bugs and didn't work properly anyway... .."

"I phoned them up the day that they'd sacked their previous programmer and they were like, 'Oh, my God! Thank God you've called.' You know. 'We've been desperately trying to find somebody. Can you come in now!'

"I went in, I said 'Right, I'll work from where I want to work from. I'll do this job how I want to do it. If it's important for me to be here, I'll be here. It's me who decides whether it's important for me to be here, not you.' And again I was the only freelancer in the building actually who had those conditions. But because they were desperate, it's not like they could turn round and say, 'Well, actually, we don't quite agree with that.' I'd say, 'Fine' and walk it."

Freelance multimedia producer, aged 43.

The freelancer felt in a relatively strong position to demand certain working conditions. He realised that the employer was in a fix and had found it difficult to recruit a suitable replacement. Such an exchange was exceptional among the freelancers interviewed for this study and served to show that there were occasions when the employer was forced to break its own conventions in order to complete projects. However, it is worth noting that the freelancer's demands were about his location and time-keeping for the project, rather than the nature of the undertaking or the rate of pay. Even in this unusual case, we might suggest that the individual had been careful to make demands which were manageable for the client.

Such attitudes help to explain the relatively low pay levels enjoyed by large numbers of freelancers. The longitudinal study of television production working, conducted by the British Film Institute³, found that freelancers and short-term contractors consistently earned less than members of staff. This was at its most pronounced in the lowest and highest income brackets (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999, Table 7, p. 22):

³ As Text Note 4 in the previous chapter (p. 115) explained, this was a panel study of television production workers - permanent, contract and freelance - conducted between 1994 and 1998. The panel included 72 production workers aged between 51 and 65 years, of which around half were freelance (British Film Institute, 1995, Table 5.2a, p. 18).

- Less than 2% of staff earned under £10,000 a year, but nearly 13% of freelancers did so;
- 6% of staff earned between £10,000 and £20,000 a year, compared with 22% of freelancers;
- 28% of staff earned more than £50,000 annually, but only 10% of freelancers did so.

Half (54%) of the freelancers interviewed for the BFI study found they had to accept lower rates if they wanted to achieve continuity in short-term assignments.

A similar picture emerged in a survey of freelance journalists, conducted for the National Union of Journalists (Baines, 2000). Here, the researcher found that:

- 23% of freelance respondents reported earning less than £10,000 a year;
- Nearly 40% said they earned less than £15,000;
- Only 15% of freelancers cited earnings of £30,000 or more, compared with 28% of staff journalists.

6.4.2. Market focus

The above three sections were examples of customer-focus in the freelance operation. Individuals attended to the needs of the client by adapting to the project requirements and financial limitations of the task, and by seeking feedback which shed light on, and clarified, their relationship. This section turns to the second component of a sustainable freelancer career, that of market focus. A striking feature of freelance life was its ever-changing composition. Individuals appeared to display an 'amoeba-like' capacity to adapt to their market environment. This metaphor was coined by one of the interviewees, a freelance editorial and marketing consultant, editor and writer, aged 41. He was explaining the many strands which made up his freelance operation and concluded that *"there's always been fairly amoebic adjusting, to subsume and digest whatever's been coming along."* He had described in detail a range of opportunities which had presented themselves to him in the months immediately before the research interview. But in order to take advantage of them, he had had to 'change hats' and 'operate like a chameleon', since they were each disparate undertakings and required different skills.

Further evidence of this was to be found in the way freelancers described themselves. When asked for a job title, many found it difficult to settle on one short title or phrase, due to the ever-changing nature of their portfolios. The freelance editorial and marketing consultant, editor and writer quoted above had been contacted by the author - some time after the in-depth interview - to suggest a job title for himself. He replied by e-mail with a 530-word summary of his freelance activities over the previous three and a half years and then posed the question: *"How do you sum this up in a sentence? Maybe this is a key challenge for those with portfolio careers?"*

Another interviewee, a woman aged 44, offered seven different titles to cover her 13 years as a freelancer in the broadcasting sub-sector. Depending on the assignment, she had called herself a freelance producer-director, a communications consultant, an editorial co-ordinator, a development executive, a lecturer, a training consultant and a manager. These were labels to cover all, or at least most, eventualities. They were indicative of the way freelancers could cross occupational boundaries and appear in different guises to suit the organisational requirements.

One of the oldest freelancers at 59 years had built his 'amoebic' properties into his marketing pitch:

"...I mean, if you look at my letterhead, I say something like: 'Communications, training and consultancy.' Which more or less covers virtually everything you can think of. So I don't, you know, I don't regard myself as a niche business in any sense... ..I would have thought for me, breadth of activity and flexibility have been the secrets, really. It's no use saying: 'I'm a broadcaster with and that's all I want to do. I just want to be heard behind the microphone.' Because if somebody wants you to write some sort of weird kind of thing, that you, that looks a bit prosaic but is quite lucrative, and you're not doing anything else, I've always done it."

Freelance broadcaster, writer and communications consultant.

This freelancer had cast his net wide, so to speak, by describing his business activities in the broadest possible terms. He had decided against a narrow definition of his field of activity and only 'cherry-picked' assignments when he was over-committed.

Another older freelancer, aged 51, found that *“every two years, I’ve changed my market completely.”* During her 30-year freelance career, she had had *“to move sideways the whole time”* in order to seize whatever opportunities might present themselves. A third freelancer, aged 36, described himself as *“an inch deep and a mile wide”* because his feature writing spanned so many subjects, outlets and styles.

Freelancers were entering different markets, working for new clients, acquiring further skills and developing fresh strands of work. However, this feature of freelancing raised an important question: how far was this market focus a product of strategic planning on the part of individuals? Were freelancers predicting, and thus exerting a measure of control over, their workload? Or were they adopting this broad and flexible pose in order to respond and react to an unpredictable flow of assignments? In summary, to what extent had individuals tried to plan strategically and how successful had these attempts been?

Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1994), in his critique of strategic planning, offers five ways in which the planning process has been depicted within organisations. These five definitions are progressively interventionist, from ‘planning as future thinking’ to ‘planning as a formal and integrated system of decisions which produce specified results’. Likewise, his definitions of strategy expose the patterned, logical, consistent and directed way in which the concept is described and examined in the business and management literature. Mintzberg’s prime interest is in the workings of organisations, rather than employees or freelancers. However, his schema is helpful, firstly, for its elaborate analysis of strategic planning as a depicted process and, secondly, for the contrast it provides with the way in which the individual freelancers involved in this research actually managed their careers. In the main, freelancers felt unable to plan ahead. Although their roles, customers and titles changed fairly frequently, this was rarely due to concrete, pre-designed or orchestrated plans. Individuals were not engaged in future thinking, or in the more elaborate forms of strategic planning.

This is surprising given the number of pages dedicated to the value of such systematic approaches by the ‘How to freelance?’ literature. Freelancers occasionally castigated themselves for their lack of strategic thinking and business planning. It had seemed a laudable and advisable pursuit, but not one in which freelancers were generally engaged. Freelancers never knew *“where these little*

funny little jobs are going to lead to", to quote one freelancer. A new client could develop into a regular, lucrative source of work for several years. Or they could represent a one-off undertaking which led to nothing further. Even the freelancer who described herself as *"a great strategist"* and *"a really good strategic thinker"* had never *"sat down and put it down on paper."* Instead, she had allowed ideas and options to roll constantly in her head. She had sounded out head-hunters, sought advice, and adjusted her commitments in order to improve her financial security. But in her eyes, there had never been a long-term freelance strategy.

The older freelancers tended to accept this inability to plan ahead as a given feature of freelancing. The fact that they were still freelancers after so many years was a reflection, possibly, of their ability *"...to subsume and digest whatever's been coming along..."*, to repeat the 'amoeba' quote used earlier. They realised that prescribed routes could be hazardous, rather than helpful, in maintaining a regular and interesting flow of work. Freelancers and key informants cited individuals they had known to demonstrate the dangers of pursuing particular strands or clients to the exclusion of others. This excerpt, from an interview with a freelance feature writer and publisher's reader, editor and copywriter, aged 59, captures this well:

"I mean, I do meet people who seem to have been much more strategic than I have. I mean, they've... well, I don't know about strategic but maybe they've had a very particular strand of freelancing that they've decided to pursue and they've, kind of, developed a sort of expertise in that. On the other hand, it seems to me that very often that's... they've slightly painted themselves into a corner because of that. You know, that's what they've pursued and it's worked up to a point but then maybe they've actually come to a crunch point where they haven't been able to do that any more and so they haven't been able to do anything else... I suppose I'm thinking of a, sort of, health journalist that I met, you know, who definitely specialised in this... she just decided that there was a sort of... that there was a kind of niche there that needed filling and that she could do it and that she went all out for that. So, I suppose, I would call that perhaps a bit more strategic than me. Where as mine was just very serendipitous. You know, I hoped something would come along and usually it did."

Freelance feature writer and publisher's reader, editor and copywriter.

Freelancers were unable to see how they could devise a strategy which would help them secure and manage work, other than their current approach of being open and responsive to opportunities as they arose. Two of the younger freelancers, a male feature writer and a female sub-editor/writer, both in their late 30s, thought a plan might be advisable but they were sceptical as to how effective it would be. The first excerpt, from the male feature writer, focuses on the difficulties he sees in being more forward-looking about the day-to-day management of his freelance work. Asked if he had 'a system' for managing the flow of work, he replied:

"No, I don't. I ought to, shouldn't I? I really should. I don't know. This is the question, I suppose. I mean, I do feel, yes, I suppose I'm a, sort of, methodical, systematic person so I keep lists of which ideas I've put to who and things, stuff like that. But I'm not, no I haven't got a system beyond that. Perhaps I should? ... But I don't know what the system would be. I don't know quite how it would work. I think that's the problem... you know, it's difficult to be very, sort of, methodical like that because... the business itself has so many variables. You know, you might put an idea to an editor. You've no idea whether they're going to pick up on it or not. They might be very busy and not be able to come back to you for two weeks. They might just not like it or, you know, they might be away. It might well be that they're actually, you know, full up for now. So you really cannot tell. It's so variable, it - you know I don't think you could ever put a system into practice..."

Freelance feature-writer.

He suggests that it is the nature of his relationship with his commissioner which prevented him developing a strategic approach to his work. There were so many unknowns in the relations he had with employers. His detachment from their daily operations meant it could take time before his ideas were dealt with: commissions could depend on a range of factors which were beyond his control.

The second example is provided by a female sub-editor/writer who had made attempts to exert a degree of control over her clientele. She had always intended, during her five years as a freelancer, to design and execute a marketing plan in which she carefully targeted and approached a number

of potential clients, having researched the organisations, their output and pay scales and tailored her curriculum vitae (c.v.) and covering letter accordingly. However, she had never actually implemented her self-promotion campaign. It had seemed a good idea: she had wanted to even out the fluctuations in her workload - the intensity of work during certain periods and paucity of work at others. But the plan had lain dormant. In the following excerpt, she reveals her ambivalence about the wisdom of her strategic plan.

"I think that's the sort of thing (a marketing plan) that everyone's got to do. But I'm not sure how successful it is. In my experience, and what I've heard from other people, it's all, it's contacts and word of mouth that is everything. And sending out c.v.s is very much hit and miss, really. I think it might have been slightly different in my case because I would have been sending out c.v.s to people I've heard of. Or to companies who, sort of, were very similar to the companies I worked for, who might have heard of me, for instance, and might have been interested in following me up. But I think contacts is everything. And contacts is how I've always got my work and how most other people that I know of have got theirs. So even then, I was a little bit doubtful as to how successful a campaign, that such a campaign would be and that I ... I mean, I was in two minds about it because I thought, if I targeted myself really, really well, was very careful of the companies I approached, then I felt that I had a reasonably good chance of success. But, then again, it depends what you mean by success. Some of them might pick up the c.v. and think, 'Ah yes, this looks good, I'll remember this person.' But who knows how long it might be before they actually get in touch and commission something from you. So I wasn't really that sure."

Freelance sub-editor & writer.

As mentioned above, older freelancers were more accepting of the need to react constantly to new and repeat sources of work. Their explanations contain further clues as to the reasons for his lack of strategic control. An illustrator and author, aged 52, was asked why she had not developed a long-term strategy during her 23 years as a freelancer:

"Well, you couldn't have, could you... .. Freelancing isn't like that."

Freelance illustrator and author.

She develops this a few lines further on in the transcript by explaining that future assignments were dependent on current successes. She was aware that the publishing house with which she was developing a popular series of illustrated children's books might end their relationship at any time.

"I mean, (the publishing house) may very well never ask me to do another book. So there's no point in thinking, you know... building up sort of... relying on them in any way, because why should they? You'll only get work if the last book's been successful and you don't know if it's going to... It's not only down to you, either. It's just what people like at the time. It's a lot of luck and chance and how it's presented and how they (the publishing house) sell it and how good they are at selling it and, I mean, I might do a wonderful book and no-one likes it. Or you might do something that's not very nice and people love it. So it's terribly... you just... you couldn't make any predictions on anything."

Freelance illustrator and author.

Another freelancer summarised this fatalistic approach in this way:

"How do most freelancers get work? How do they develop their careers? I don't know, other than this fairly passive, reactive, 'get lucky', sort of way... . No, I'd love to learn to write the algorithm but I can't. It's a combination of happenstance, the divorced friend who moves to another part of London and gets in touch with you. It's a development from work you've done with somebody and they want more of it. It's (pause)... it's sometimes working at your contacts. Sometimes, sort of, suggesting to them that you might do this. Um. It's just tending routinely to a client that you've had for a long, long time. Carrying on doing that and just making sure that you keep your standards up and you keep on doing a good job. It's, you know, it's all of the above. It just seems to come."

Freelance broadcaster, writer and communications consultant, aged 59.

The freelance existence appeared to defy logic. According to this interpretation, there was no point in constructing a plan – or 'the algorithm' – since the process was so random and unpredictable and unknowable. The freelancer quoted above describes the need to cultivate a broad range of

clients, to deliver quality work on time, to suggest ideas which were appropriate to the organisation, and so on. But there was no formal, ordered process which he could document or recommend. He simply had to wait for work to come to him.

"It comes to me. It always comes to me. So that if I look at my diary, it gets sort of filled up but I don't know what it's going to be filled up with. And it, that's always struck, over the years, you know. I've been doing this a long time now, twenty odd years. It's always struck me as being quite weird. I do not know what's going to be lying ahead of me..."

Freelance broadcaster, writer & communications consultant, aged 59.

In summary, freelancers managed to survive in the labour market by remaining customer- and market-focused. They met targets and deadlines, no matter how inconvenient; they 'tuned in' to the client's priorities and needs; and they deployed skill and sensitivity in negotiating fees and conditions. In addition, they remained highly adaptable to market opportunities, changing their portfolios to fit in with client demands.

Freelancers felt there were too many unknowns, too many factors beyond their control, to allow for strategic planning. Products changed, commissioners moved on, relationships flourished or soured, fashions shifted. Projects failed or succeeded, clients needs fluctuated, and contacts either produced work or did not. Given these multiple factors, long-term strategic exercises seemed both time-consuming and futile. Even if freelancers had the resources to engage in an exercise as detailed as the one described by the female writer/sub-editor above, they were doubtful as to its usefulness in helping them seek and retain clients.

6.5. Navigating the insecurities of freelancing

The following section focuses on the uncertainties and risks of freelancing. How exposed were individuals to sudden losses of work? How did freelancers experience and manage conflict in the employment relationship? Were there sources of professional, financial and emotional support for the solo, self-employed freelancer? To what extent did these sources cushion a person's working life?

6.5.1. The finite nature of freelance employment

A defining feature of freelancing was the finite nature of assignments. Freelance employment involved tasks that were required for a limited time. Jobs tended to be discrete and distinctive pieces of work: a photographic assignment; a sound recording for a television documentary; a web page which needed designing and producing; a consulting job with a specific aim; the launch of a new service; maternity cover for an absent member of staff; programme ideas which needed developing; or a newspaper supplement with a specific deadline. The freelancer offered a professional service and set of skills which complemented or supplemented the resources of the employer for a prescribed amount of time. This was usually for a concentrated period, but could also be for a regular slot for part of the week, month or year.

Because of these boundaries, 'termination' was an intrinsic property of the freelance employment relationship. It was a form of work with an anticipated ending. The precise date of this finish might be uncertain but, sooner or later, the freelancer would need to find another assignment, a contract extension, a new commission or role.

The employer was not obliged to extend the work beyond the limits of the agreed assignment. Individuals might hope for continued employment, but they could neither expect nor demand it. It was explicitly understood – although not necessarily welcomed by individuals – that responsibility for a continuous stream of work and income lay with the freelancer. Unlike the protection afforded the permanent member of staff, a freelancer whose employment came to an abrupt end received neither redundancy pay nor help with redeployment or retraining.

Although termination was inevitable, it was a process that was often difficult to anticipate, even for those freelancers with the most sensitive of 'antennae'. Broadly, there were two reasons for termination. The first involved organisational factors largely beyond the individual's control, such as re-organisations and changes in commissioning staff. The second involved factors related to the individual and their reputation with the employer.

6.5.1.2. Organisational factors leading to termination

Work could cease for a number of economic, organisational and departmental reasons:

- The media product or service might have been overhauled, changed direction or ceased operating;
- The employing organisation might have instituted a new regime, and brought in different methods of working which used fewer or different kinds of freelancers;
- The individual who commissioned the freelancer might have acquired new responsibilities, changed jobs, been dismissed, left the industry or retired.

The comment below was made by a magazine features editor who had been a freelancer herself until 11 months earlier. At the time of the research interview, senior managers at her weekly magazine were discussing major organisational changes that would affect the type of freelance work she would be commissioning in the future. She recognised that her regular freelancers would neither be consulted over the changes nor given advance warning as to the likely consequences.

"...having been freelancing, I mean, I know... ... you wouldn't be consulted even if your livelihood depended on it. And nobody would bother to ask you about it. The work would just be there or not be there."

Features editor, weekly magazine.

Freelancers talked about the regular turnover of commissioners and the revamping of media products, both of which affected their standing as suppliers of labour. There was a

lack of continuity and constant changes among staff. One freelance feature writer had sent a health feature to a national newspaper and, due to a succession of staff, had spoken to three separate health editors about the piece. As another freelancer said:

"... you have to be constantly, sort of, you know, boxing clever because people change all the time. The people that you know change. You know, you could suddenly find that no work is coming to you and it's only because the person who used to send it to you has left and nobody's told you."

Freelance feature writer and publisher's reader, editor & copywriter.

6.5.1.2. Individual factors

The second reason for termination was connected to individuals, their reputations and the quality of their working relationships with clients. Freelancers were aware of the dangers of being seen to be irritating, unprofessional, unfashionable, slow, dull or unreasonable. They could find themselves stereotyped by employers as unsuitable for current requirements. Two of the people interviewed for this study believed they had been 'blackballed' by particular commissioners within the broadcasting sector due to their previous alliances and work histories. Their approaches to these clients had failed to elicit work, but it was a long time before they realised why. **In the first instance**, the freelancer had been tipped off by an independent producer with whom she had worked for many years. As a result, she began to explore other avenues of work. **In the second instance**, the freelance producer-director had pressed for more information after futile efforts to win independent production contracts. He described his face-to-face confrontation with the relevant network television programme commissioner. The response from the client (X) was evasive. Nevertheless, the message to the freelancer (Y) was clear:

"...one day, I said, 'Come on (X), what's the matter?'

He said, 'Well, you know, I mean ask around and people say (Y), he's a really nice interesting bloke and does interesting programmes, but...'

And I said, 'But what?'

He said, 'Oh well, you know, I mean...'

I said, 'No, I don't know what you mean. I've no idea what you mean.'

And I suddenly realised that there were rumours going around (about me) and I still don't know what they are."

Freelance producer-director.

The freelancer had felt that his work record and his standing in the eyes of this employer had prevented him from winning commissions. But it had taken a pointed question to elicit this information. (See Box 6.2., the case study of a freelance producer-director, which describes a similar encounter between this individual and another commissioner.) It is reminiscent of the advice offered by the freelancer in the earlier section of this chapter: *"People are nervous. They'll duck away from it."* Employers were not obliged to discuss, explain or justify their reasons for hiring or dismissing freelancers. Individuals who confronted their clients to demand an explanation risked alienating them further.

Interviews with individual freelancers revealed many instances where work had ceased without notification or reason. The uncertainty over whether it was due to organisational or personal factors fuelled a self-doubt which undermined confidence and trust in employers. One freelance producer/researcher said the lack of explanation led to feelings of anguish when no work was forthcoming. Had there been a more open and informative dialogue, *"...then you wouldn't get so desperate about, 'Well, are they not ringing me up because they haven't got any work, or are they not ringing me up because they don't think I'm any good?'"*

The lack of intelligence made it difficult for freelancers to predict and prevent such terminations, and thus avoid what could be a financially crippling gap in work. It meant that freelancers could feel powerless to control or influence events. Unless they had cultivated a special relationship with a client - where there was mutual trust and a sharing of confidences - freelancers were vulnerable to rapid, unforeseen and inexplicable changes in demand. This sense of powerlessness was captured by a freelance journalist and training consultant who was on the brink of ending his career:

"What I think me, and likewise pals, try and do is keep morale up, and one way of doing that is to delude ourselves that everything is more rosy than it is. What we all realise is that, of course, we are merely at the whim of these casual employers who can drop us without even saying anything."

Freelance journalist & training consultant, personal email, 23 October 1999.

Establishing mutual trust and understanding with clients could be difficult, especially where the freelancer was largely home-based. This appeared to be especially problematic in the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sector, where a large proportion of freelancers used their home as their office. Freelancers in this sub-sector reported how hard it was to establish personal relations unless individual commissioning staff were known to them already or they worked from client premises on a regular basis. They appreciated the value of face-to-face contact and its importance in gaining trust and empathy. Yet, even the most informal encounter could be difficult to engineer. A typical case is offered by the freelancer, below, who had attempted to secure a meeting with a contact with whom she had had fairly regular dealings by telephone and e-mail. But getting to see him had proved difficult.

"I actually suggested to, who was it, I think it was the travel editor of the (daily newspaper), that I came out to Canary Wharf and we went for a coffee. And he was just quite taken aback by the idea. He just said, 'Gosh, nobody's ever suggested that.' And I thought, 'Well, I'd quite like to come out to Canary Wharf. I can get a bus from here.' He said, 'Well, we're just so busy here. But I'm always accessible on the telephone.' He said, 'I'll always talk to you on the telephone.' But it's easier if you're face-to-face. It is a loss that."

Freelance feature writer, aged 51.

Freelancers were torn between the need to cultivate good working relations with clients and the need to spend time efficiently, and to be seen to be doing so. They realised that telephone and e-mail links were often sufficient to ensure regular contact with commissioners. They also knew that clients were working under pressure and had little time for leisurely breaks. The result was a distance between home-working freelancers and the organisational epicentre, and a lack of regular opportunity to extend networks or improve relationships.

Basing themselves for part of the week in a client's office solved some of the problems associated with isolation. Where the client had sufficient resources to accommodate them, this could also be convenient to the employer as well. However, the freelancer could find themselves having to adapt to office conventions, such as in hours of working, dress codes and attendance at meetings. Also, there tended to be a loss of the independence needed in order to search for, and satisfy, other clients in order to maintain a diverse client base.

6.5.2. Conflict in the employment relationship

It is perhaps unsurprising that stories of intransigence from freelancers over the terms or nature of an assignment were rare among interviewees. There was a recognition that being 'difficult' was a hazardous enterprise. There appeared to be a general reluctance by freelancers to engage in behaviour which could be interpreted by employers as awkward, inconvenient or greedy.

Evidence of this reticence to confront or make demands of employers emerged in the accounts of the way work was undertaken and rewarded. For instance, in the broadcasting sub-sector, a freelance producer-director had been shocked by the nature of exchanges between broadcast commissioners and their independent suppliers. Experienced, authoritative and previously combative individuals had appeared to transform into acquiescent individuals in order to secure projects.

"I couldn't believe it, going to meetingsto see them with these commissioning editors. I couldn't believe it. It was like some sort of ... The last time I'd seen anything like it was when I wrote a piece about the Arabs of Earls Court and I went to meet a key Qatari Arab who had everyone sat round and they had to wait to ask a question... .. this atmosphere that you were the lowest of the low. And I couldn't believe it when I went to these meetings. Because I was used to quite, very interesting but quite aggressive meetings where you might lose the argument or whatever but it was tough all over. This was all, you know, kowtow."

Male freelance producer-director, aged 54.

This older freelancer had been a permanent and long-serving member of staff at a large ITV broadcaster before becoming an independent producer-director. As an employee, he had been used to contentious discussions among in-house peers over programme commissions. But the negotiations between the commissioning editors and their external suppliers, described above, were of an entirely different order. The client was seen as having power over his 'underlings', who were expected to behave in an obsequious and deferential way, thus the expression he used, 'kowitz'.

Freelancers had to be careful about questioning or challenging employment practices, even if they were patently unfair. For instance, a freelance feature writer operating in the newspaper and magazine sector had suggested an article for the homes and property section of a daily newspaper. It had been discussed with, commissioned by and delivered to the section editor. But it had not been used and the freelancer had not been paid a commission fee. This had been the second instance of non-payment by this particular section editor. On this second occasion, the freelancer had taken the precaution of confirming the commission, including a note of the content and deadline, by fax.

Freelancer: "This time, after our conversation, I sent her a fax to confirm, you know, our conversation. What it was going to be about, blah, blah, blah. When I'd have it in by. All that sort of stuff. And still it made no difference. You know, they didn't run it and they didn't pay me and it was one of those things that was just pegged to one event so I couldn't really even sort of, you know, flog it to anyone else. So I think... I mean personally I think that's absolutely appalling. I just don't know how anybody can do that. Obviously that woman has never been a freelancer or doesn't have any friends who, close friends who are freelancers, because how you can mess somebody around like that... ..

Interviewer: "Could you have followed that up? Chased it up?

Freelancer: "Well, the problem is... this is the problem with being a freelancer, I think. I'm sure other people have said this to you as well. You're really... you don't have any leverage, you know. At the end of the day, I could have

made a fuss and I could have sort of shouted and made threats and stuff but... at the end of the day, I had to think: 'Well, you know, I might want to write for them something in the future.'"

Male freelance feature writer, aged 36.

This freelancer's sense of injustice is clear. He talks of his incomprehension at the behaviour of the employer. Yet he felt powerless to confront her directly, or expose such unfair practices. He believed that his future relationship depended on him accepting such adverse conditions.

Another example, in the same sector, is provided by a women feature writer aged 42 who had been commissioned to write an article and devise a quiz on a health issue. She had supplied the material and it had been published and paid for by the national newspaper. But the introductory paragraphs of the article had been rewritten and another journalist had been credited as the author. The freelancer had regarded this as *"totally despicable"*. She explained: *"...seeing all your hard work go into somebody else's name is devastating."* In this example, the freelancer had pursued her complaint – but only up to a point. She had rung the commissioning editor to complain, but he had said he was too busy to discuss the matter. She then wrote to the editor in overall charge of the daily newspaper, but had not received a reply. It had confirmed her view that she was regarded as *"nothing"* to the newspaper. She felt she had no choice but to 'like it or lump it'. Either she withdrew her services entirely or she accepted the prevailing working practices. Her initial complaint had gone unheeded and she had decided to pursue it no further.

Freelancers appeared to have only one form of retribution: withdrawal of labour. Unless they were highly valued and integral to the client's operations, their position was weak. The two feature writers mentioned above both felt dispensable to the newspapers in question. The male freelancer, talking specifically about the section editor who failed to pay, explained why:

Interviewer: "I would presume people like you are quite valuable to editors.

Freelancer: "Well, there are quite a few of us really, I think - that's the thing. Yes, there are just so many, you know. Okay, she... we'd have a row. She wouldn't use me but, at the end of the day, she's got probably twenty freelancers

she can call on... you know, there's twenty of us and one of her, so at the end of the day that, I think that's the feeling I have."

Freelance feature writer.

The second freelancer saw her skills as easily replaceable.

Freelancer: "You work your butt off for somebody and if it suits them you get dumped.

Interviewer: "Isn't that against their best long-term interests?

Freelancer: "No, no, no, no – writers, ten a penny."

Freelance feature writer.

A similar resignation emerges in another interview, with an older feature writer.

Interviewer: "But how strong is your position to say, 'Right I'm not going to work for you any more?'

Freelancer: "Oh easily, you can just not. It's because it's no skin off their nose. It's your loss really..."

Freelancers who took a stand had to be prepared for the consequences. Interviewees did reveal the rare occasions when they refused work, challenged working practices and, even, had arguments with commissioners. The outcome was usually the loss of further work. Employers withdrew assignments for the foreseeable future. A woman freelance copyeditor in her early 50s had handed back an assignment because she felt the deadline unreasonable.

"I did have, 18 months ago, a situation where I was offered something extremely large. It was... how much? It was £7,000 worth of work. Now that's a lot. That's... and they wanted it done in something like three months and then it was late. It didn't come in. So they then said, 'Could you do this other thing in between?' And this other thing, which was small - in inverted commas... it turned out to be much bigger... And it ended up I was trying to do the two of them together and I was... I wasn't sleeping. I was just really feeling really

pressured and I just rang them up one day and said, 'I actually don't think I can cope with it. You'll have to take it back.' You know. I haven't actually worked for them again."

Freelance copyeditor.

The relationship ended although, on this occasion, the freelancer was rather relieved:

"... I think I'd rather not work for someone who feels... who doesn't discuss it with you. And just feels that you should be able to do £7,000 worth of work in two to three months. Which is just ridiculous. If you actually work it out physically, how many hours you have to spend to do it all..."

Freelance copyeditor.

The next and final example is unusual in the way the client is confronted and challenged. Such episodes were rare in the lives of the freelancers interviewed for this study. The story is told by a freelance editorial and marketing consultant, editor and writer over a considerable period of time during the interview and contained a number of identifiers to the parties involved. For the sake of brevity and anonymity, this story is paraphrased.

The freelancer had developed and produced a quarterly customer magazine for a large corporate client through a contract publishing company. After two years, the freelancer had asked for a substantial fee increase from the contract publisher which had been awarded the commission. He felt he had had a strong case: the magazine he had helped to found and develop had won a customer magazine of the year award; it had expanded to include several supplements and had established a sizeable readership among the corporation's customers; and he had discovered, through independent sources, the extent of the profit margin enjoyed by his client. He demanded a doubling of his fees plus an extra person to help him cope with the expansion of the product. He helped to produce a job specification for the extra person and then, without warning, found his involvement severely curtailed. The extra person had become a staff member in day-to-day charge of the product and he had been relegated to a marginal, consulting role. The consequence was a grander title, a higher rate, but a drop in his annual income from this client, from £40,000 to £9,000, due to

his being employed for a matter of weeks rather than months. The freelancer had been bitter about his treatment and appalled that an employer could treat him in this way.

The encounter reveals the tenuous and insecure relationship between freelancers and their clients. This is described in stark terms by the owner of a news and photographic agency. Careful to distance himself from such callous attitudes and behaviour by saying, “**Not me personally...**” (highlighted in bold in the excerpt), his excerpt raises our awareness of the brittle side of freelance employment:

*“... when I, with my tiny business, look at my payroll each month, it frightens me. But you know, commissions I pay out to freelancers to do stuff for me, I don't think about for a minute because I don't have to do the National Insurance for them or the tax for them or the P.A.Y.E. or BUPA or whatever. Or if they're sick for a month. I couldn't give a toss, in the nicest possible way, because there's no relationship there. There's no financial bond between us. You know, if they get run over by a car tomorrow, I find another freelancer. **Not me personally**, but if I'm running... if I'm running (a national newspaper) and my stringer in South Africa drops dead, it doesn't matter to me because I've got ten agencies I can call in South Africa who each have hundreds of journalists working for them and I'll just get stuff from them, instead. They're not... I haven't had to spend any time training them. I've made no investment. I've made no investment. So it doesn't really matter whether they come or go. You know, if I'm not happy with an employee, it's up to me to nurture them as much as possible to get what I want out of them, rather than just say, 'You're sacked.' But if a freelancer pisses me off once, I'll just get rid of them.”*

Owner, news and photographic agency.

This key informant saw a clear distinction between employees, to whom he had a regular financial commitment and a responsibility for getting the best out of them, and freelancers, to whom he had made no investment and thus regarded as dispensable.

Being unavailable for work could also jeopardise relations between the freelancer and client. Four of the freelancers involved in this study had suffered serious ill health. One of these was the

newspaper photographer featured as a case study in Section 6.3. of this chapter. He had been working as a freelancer for 18 months, mainly for his previous long-time employer, when he had had a serious heart attack. He ceased working. Fourteen months later, when he was interviewed for this research, he had been unable to resume the same level of freelance working. (See Box 6.3., the case of study of the freelance photographer.) Another freelancer had broken both arms whilst on holiday and had been unable to undertake any work for more than three months. Domestic responsibilities could be equally constricting. The care of young children, or the ill health of family members or friends, could seriously jeopardise the freelancer's ability to complete assignments on time and/or to seek new work.

Personal health and domestic crises were not the preserve of freelancers, of course. Permanent employees could also find themselves incapacitated by such events. But the self-employed freelancer engaged in simultaneous projects for rival clients was not entitled to financial assistance, compassionate leave or temporary cover to tide them over. If their productivity ceased, so did their freelance income.

Individuals were not only liable to fund themselves during periods of inactivity, such as sickness and holidays, but were also responsible for financing training courses, pension schemes, insurance cover, development work and, where relevant, the running of their own office.

If work ended abruptly, there were neither redundancy packages nor redeployment costs to cushion the effects. Freelance fees tended to include a premium to cover such insecurities and overheads. But rarely did it provide adequate compensation when gaps appeared between contracts. Interviews with individual freelancers contained many examples of unexpected and destabilising incidents which affected their ability to earn a living and for which there was no recompense from the employer. Unless a freelancer was employed on a continuous contract, his/her income could vary widely from one month or year to the next.

This is supported by evidence found in the British Film Institute tracking study (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999, p. 23), where:

- 63% of freelancers had worked unpaid at some time during the previous 12 months;
- 30% of freelancers had done so for between one and two months;

- 21% for between two months and an entire year.

We now turn to the sources of formal and informal support to see whether these provided a measure of protection for freelancers.

6.5.3. Sources of formal and informal support

There was a diverse range of resources available to freelancers in the media industry. At the more formal level, this included recruitment agencies, professional societies and trade unions. Less formal were the electronic databases, search engines and discussion groups on the Internet. Together, they provided:

- job-matching and placement services
- legal and employment information and advice
- representation and mediation
- voluntary codes of practice and industry standards
- subsidised training
- careers guidance
- networking and discussion forums

A number of these bodies provided services which freelancers had found invaluable. For instance, a freelance multimedia designer, aged 32, had enjoyed a good working relationship with a **specialist recruitment consultancy** which had found her a number of engagements during her eight years as a freelancer. She felt the risks of non-payment or unfair treatment were lessened by being on their books. She had welcomed the way the agency issued standard terms of engagement, guaranteed regular payments for as long as the assignment lasted, and attempted to find her more work when it finished. She was the main earner supporting a partner and a young child, and felt she had a limited network of contacts on which to rely for commissions.

Similarly, a freelance publishing consultant, writer and editor, aged 58, gained a number of assignments through an **editorial services agency**. He was well known to the owner of the agency, who was able to offer him a broad range of projects which might not otherwise have come

his way. The owner had also acted as an intermediary between the freelancer and client when one project had proved far more complex than first anticipated.

Those freelancers who were members of **trade unions** could also find a measure of protection in the rates and conditions negotiated by officials, and the advice and representation which was available. Unions and **professional societies** sought to combat the isolation of freelancers and to provide information, advice, subsidised training and fair codes of practice.

Less formal support mechanisms were the electronic databases, search engines and discussion groups on the Internet. In the new media sub-sector, Web-based discussion and job search sites were seen as providing platforms of information which kept freelancers in touch. A Web applications consultant and developer cited a jobs site as having provided him with a vital link to the current opportunities in the market.

6.5.4. The limits to protection

However, there were limits to the amount of protection these formal and semi-formal agencies could provide. Although such services could be helpful, none could:

- (a) prevent periods of inactivity or under-activity;
- (b) guarantee repeat custom or regular work; or
- (c) impose or enforce set rates of pay for specific tasks or projects.

In addition, there were problems associated with relying on such services. Four main reasons are given here. Firstly, these agencies and services were neither available nor appropriate to all freelancers. Specialist placement services, such as the **editorial services agency** mentioned above, tended to operate in niche markets and handled only certain types of freelancers. **Recruitment agencies** registered only those freelancers for whom there was a known demand. The recruitment consultancy mentioned above turned away, on average, 250 applicants a week because they were felt to be unsuitable – either having the wrong skills or the wrong attitude.

Secondly, agencies could incur charges which freelancers could ill afford. Although it was common for the employer to bear the financial burden of placements in the new media sector, in the broadcasting sector, it was not unusual for the individual to be charged the cost of finding new assignments. One specialist **Web-based job matching and search site** for employers and freelance production professionals charged freelancers a monthly fee for placing their curriculum vitae on the site. Although this was a modest amount, freelancers could begrudge the payment, especially during the months when they were not actively seeking work.

Thirdly, **recruitment agencies** could impose terms and conditions which undermined the freelancer's autonomy and viability. Agencies needed to be sure that freelancers were available for placement, otherwise there was no point in having them on their books. Freelancers had to be flexible in their approach and attitudes: prepared to blend into the employing organisation, observing standard codes, including dress and working hours. The standard mode of working for freelancers placed by the two recruitment agencies whose managing directors were interviewed for this study was 'full-time for a set period'. This left freelancers with little leeway to work for other clients simultaneously. Thus the route which appeared to offer most protection for freelancers was also the one which imposed the most conditions. Recruitment agents did not see their role as protectors of freelancers. Commissions came from employers, and it was only by satisfying their needs, and thus earning income, that they could exist at all. The point was emphasised by both managing directors in differing ways:

Interviewer: "Do you think that it's your role to afford them (freelancers) some protection? Are you there...

Agency: "Against what?

Interviewer: "Against, I suppose, a flexible labour market, against, you know, demand and supply. Do you see your role as helping the individual trying to spread over work flow?

Agency: "No, because we're working for our clients. We're working for our clients. ... we wouldn't feel that we had any obligation to those (freelance) individuals. And equally, I don't think they would feel that we should have. I mean, I think that... certainly the ones we deal with, they'd look to themselves to find their next jobs... I mean, obviously, through a network

of people like us that they know. But no, we... I guess that's the beauty of the contract market. You just bring in the resources when you need them and then you... Now the reality is that the very, very good people tend to move from one contract to another and we would try and facilitate that as much as possible. But, no. No sense of obligation. No."

Managing director, recruitment agency.

"... let's not forget, and sometimes we do, our fees come from the clients. That's where we make our money. Our margin is made on the fees that we charge people out at."

Managing director, recruitment agency.

Both excerpts reveal the limited role agencies could play in helping freelancers secure a continuous stream of work. Unless employers wanted their skills, and were prepared to pay the agency commission, then these agencies were unable to supply them with work.

Fourthly, the intervention of a third party, such as a professional society or trade union, was unlikely to endear the freelancer to the client. Employers could see such bodies as combative, unnecessary, irrelevant or inflexible. Freelancers had to be careful how they sought help if they wanted to retain the client in the future. One freelancer had heard of union members asking for anonymity when their cases were being handled by union officials:

"... one of the field officers for the union, I know him really well and a lot of the time he's ... chasing after either money owed, or holiday pay, or one thing and another and he has to be very, very careful in the way he does it. 'Cause often people will come to him and say, 'Can you help me? But can you do it without naming me?' And he's had to find ways of getting round it and saying... and generalising and taking issues up in that way."

Editor, producer and & training consultant.

In addition, unions had to be wary of how many resources they devoted to individual cases. These often involved issues of non payment, incorrect payment, copyright infringement or contractual

breaches. In the words of a union official: *"...and all of that, usually, by the time it comes to the trade union's attention, has become, or has reached a stage where, quite frankly, there is very little that can be done other than to reach for a solicitor."* This was an expensive process and not one which usually helped that particular individual secure more work from the wayward employer.

In summary, then, whilst these agencies could be helpful to freelancers, none could act as ongoing personal guardians. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that they played a relatively small part in the day-to-day lives of most freelancers. In response to questions about individual support systems (see Appendix 03, Interview schedules), freelancers were far more likely to cite an informal, ad hoc networks of peers, friends and family members. The most informal support networks appeared to be the most effective in maintaining morale: a sympathetic partner; a supportive daughter; a close and understanding friend; a woman's freelance lunch group; a male friendship group; or an e-mail network of professional freelance peers. These support mechanisms were close to hand, cost-neutral, uncomplicated, time efficient and usually divorced from the client's work setting. They tended to involve regular contact, mutual understanding and camaraderie. They appeared to offer some relief from the isolation and uncertainties of the freelance labour market. The following excerpts give a flavour of the way informal networks helped:

"...and it was (my wife) who said, 'Look, you're the best writer I know' and all the rest of it and she gave me the support necessary to put me back... Then working with people like (a former colleague and friend), who'd been in the same position and, then, every now and again, phoning each other up and just saying, 'What's your plan today?' 'What are you actually going to be doing today to find work?' etc has sort of kept us going really."

Editorial and marketing consultant, editor & writer.

"... having somebody near you (who) is very supportive. I mean, I think I can't really stress it enough. Having somebody who says: 'Well, okay, I'm sure it will pick up.' That's kind of really nice to have..."

Broadcaster, writer and communications consultant.

"I've carried on clinging on by my fingernails. Some of it, I have to say, with (a friend and fellow freelancer) mopping up my tears and putting me back on my feet and saying, 'There, there. Shift yourself.' You know."

Feature writer.

Four of the women interviewed for this study, including the freelance feature writer above, were part of an informal lunch group which met in each other's homes. When asked about support systems, each of the women mentioned the group as important in sustaining them over the years. In the main, they were writers in the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sub-sector. They valued the guidance, problem-solving and friendship available within the group. Their own reports of its value were supplemented by my attending two of the lunches and hosting a third in my own home. It was noteworthy that on these occasions, exchanges were rarely confined to issues connected to freelancing. Group members felt free to discuss anything of concern, from family matters such as an impending separation or a child's chronic ill-health, to recollections of favourite books or holidays abroad. Conversation roamed wide about current interests and concerns. There was also much jocular, gossip and humorous asides. Members brought and shared food and drink and they encouraged the next lunch host to invite their own freelance friends. Support was not confined only to the duration of the lunches. A number of the members were in regular contact in-between, ringing or e-mailing each other with queries, contact numbers and messages of support and providing practical help where it was needed.

In summary, freelancing was a highly insecure form of employment. Streams of work could end abruptly, without warning or explanation. This could be due to organisational factors outside of the individual's control or to clashes in style or opinion between freelancers and their commissioners. Freelancers were cautious of confronting clients, even when practices were unfair. This tallies with the previous chapter's descriptions of those 'sensible' and 'amenable' freelancers favoured by employers. Individuals who did challenge working conditions risked alienating clients and cutting themselves off from sources of work.

Further risks were experienced in the general lack of income security for those who fell ill, became unemployed or needed time off to attend to family crises. If output ceased, so did a freelancer's

income, unless they had independent financial means. Those who were not on continuous contracts for one main employer could find wide fluctuations in their monthly and annual incomes. Although there were many sources of non-financial support available to freelancers, none could prevent periods of inactivity or guarantee regular paid work. The most frequently and warmly cited means of support was the informal networks of family members, friends and professional peers.

6.6. Freelancing in later life

We now turn to the final section of this chapter. Before proceeding, it is worth reminding ourselves of the central research question of the thesis, namely, the viability of freelancing for older workers. Did freelancing allow individuals the degree of flexibility, control and remuneration which they required in the run up to their exit from the paid labour market?

Fourteen freelancers aged 50 and over took part in the study. The analysis of *interview transcripts* and fieldwork notes revealed moments or occasions when there was a degree of freedom and independence in their freelance work; a balance between paid and unpaid responsibilities and interests; a variety of complementary and satisfying assignments; and a mutually-respectful and lucrative relationship with clients. Freelancers could walk away from unreasonable working conditions, such as unrealistic deadlines, unpleasant clients, impossible briefs or uneconomic rates of pay. Rarely did they resort to this, for reasons that have been explored earlier in this chapter. Nevertheless, freelancing held undeniable attractions for this older group.

Several older freelancers reported that they had been working outside the confines of an organisation for so many years that they now felt 'unemployable', neither desired by nor desiring to return to a full-time position with one employer. They felt it would be hard, at this relatively late stage in their career, to adjust and conform to a narrow or prescribed job specification drawn up by the employer, and to fit in with office procedures and routines. Three older freelancers – two women and one man – who had applied for full-time jobs had, for differing reasons, been unable to pursue them. The older man, a 58-year-old publishing consultant, writer and editor, had been rejected for an in-house position at a publishing company, suspecting his age and salary demands to be contributing factors. Of the two older women, one - a freelance media regulatory adviser and change consultant aged 55 - had decided not to pursue three high level positions, due to the time

involved in completing the application process and the uncertain outcome, given her age and varied work history. The other - a feature writer and publisher's reader, editor and copywriter aged 59 - had accepted a permanent position in a publishing company but had found it unsatisfactory. The office routines and altered employment relationship had proved uncomfortable and within months, she had cut down the amount of work she undertook for them and increased her freelance commitments.

Freelancing for these individuals - and for others involved in the research - represented the best, if not the only, form of employment available to them at this stage in their careers. Two of the oldest freelancers in the study, a computer applications developer aged 63 and a freelance photographer, aged 67 (see Box 6.1., a case study of a freelance photographer, in section 6.3.2.), saw freelancing as the only means by which they could remain employed within the media industry. It was also the mechanism by which they felt they could wind down slowly in the period up to retirement. The computer developer believed that his nine years as a freelancer had allowed him to make a gradual transition from his highly pressured job as the chief personnel officer for a corporate division to an eventual retirement. He had elected to work only for the media organisation which had employed him for the previous 30 years, but in a different capacity. He had been operating in a less taxing role and had gradually reduced his hours over the years. He recognised that his was an unusual case. He had switched from a managerial position in human resources to a technical support position in the technology division. It was an entirely different job, but it had suited him well and he had been able to negotiate regular, well-paid work with his former employer.

To an extent, older freelancers felt able to exert choice over the conditions of their employment, in particular, where and when they worked and for whom. Although this was a long way from the free reign which many may have desired, it did represent an element of self-determination. As the computer developer said:

Freelancer: "Choosing my working hours, choosing the jobs I do, to some extent, and being able to mix it with other things, other activities... it is, really, all under my control. People say to me, 'Oh, you still go to work three days a week.' But there's a complete difference between coming into work three days a week because I choose to and coming into work five days a week

because I've got to, because I'm contracted to come in five days a week, and I'd lose my job if I didn't come in five days. Do you see the difference?

Interviewer: "Yes.

Freelancer: "And at any time, knowing that you can stop something at any time gives you really a great sense of control, even though you don't exercise it."

Freelance computer applications developer.

This same sense of relative control was expressed by a 59-year-old freelance broadcaster, writer and communications consultant:

"I feel, compared to people in employment, and I've been employed for ten years with a publisher, I feel totally different. I just feel that I, you know, this is my company, this is my activity. It's my life. I can choose any job I want to do. If somebody offers me something, I can turn it down. I never know what's going to happen tomorrow. The world is an open place. It's different from being in a company where you've got a job specification. You know, where you work physically..."

Freelance broadcaster, writer & communications consultant.

The freelancer felt able to choose his portfolio of clients and to carry his company identity with him wherever he went. He was free to select whatever work he chose, and to undertake these tasks in his own time and space.

When freelancing delivered a regular and varied source of paid employment, it represented a source of satisfaction for older freelancers. During a group discussion with five freelancers in the broadcasting sub-sector, the conversation had focused on a succession of concerns over the lack of security for freelancers. A 51-year-old producer-director and training consultant interrupted the discussion to highlight the positive side:

"I don't think this should just be a whinge. Right. Because there are distinctive advantages. I mean, someone asked me... I was doing a session on, teaching a session on, freelance survival skills and somebody said, 'Well, why are you a freelancer?' And I said, 'When it's

working well, it's a range of work, it's a choice of work. When it's working well, it's the potential to develop on the job..."

Producer-director and training consultant.

It also meant that individuals could attend to pressing domestic matters, such as the ill-health of friends or family, bereavements and childcare, although this was unpaid, of course. Even simple home responsibilities, such as waiting for the new washing machine to be delivered, could be managed without a succession of excuses if the freelancer were home-based.

However, such portrayals of freelancing had to be set against, firstly, the insecurities of this form of work (detailed earlier in this chapter) and, secondly, the disincentives which appeared to apply to the older freelance work force. These checks to a sustainable freelance career in later life fell into four broad categories. They involved the need:

1. To maintain and replenish networks leading to freelance commissions;
2. To satisfy clients' needs on availability, delivery and skills;
3. To earn an adequate income;
4. To cultivate productive and harmonious relations with clients.

It could be argued that such disincentives applied just as easily to younger freelancers. After all, they, too, needed to find work using their contacts, to deliver appropriate output, to earn an income and to foster good working relations. However, a close examination of the research interviews indicated that, of the many facets of the freelance relationship, it was these four which could be especially problematic for older people. We will now explore these in more detail.

6.6.1. Maintaining and replenishing networks leading to freelance commissions

The previous chapter described the importance for employers of using informal networks to locate freelancers. A number of other studies have confirmed the central place of networks in the freelance relationship, in the television sub-sector (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999), film (Jones, 1996, DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, Blair, 2001), and new media (Gill and Dodd,

2000, p. 31). One author likened the self-organisation of freelance television work to “an economy of favours”, where friendships were cultivated, either sincerely or instrumentally, in order to ensure access to paid work (Ursell, 2000, p. 813). She concluded:

“Networking as a considered effort of self-enterprise is the norm. Those who do not or cannot network are substantially disadvantaged.”

(Ursell, 2000, p. 813)

Freelancers who took breaks from employment could find themselves increasingly detached from networks, organisations and working practices. This was particularly acute for mothers returning to television production work after maternity leave (Willis and Dex, 1999).

Unsurprisingly, informal networks were also the predominant method by which the freelancers involved in this study found work. They relied on friends, former colleagues and referrals by other clients or fellow freelancers.

Yet, it could be difficult to maintain and extend the network of contacts which led to these commissions. As has been described earlier in this chapter, clients were promoted or demoted, left the organisation and retired from the industry. In the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sub-sector, where many freelancers were home-based, it could be hard to cultivate existing networks and even harder to develop new ones. Older freelancers were aware that permanent members of staff, including commissioners, tended to be younger than them and this could act as a disincentive to showing one’s face. As one freelancer said:

“I was thinking, recently, what a good thing that people don’t see me, in a way, ‘cause it doesn’t matter (that) I’m getting older. Because as long as I’m doing the sort of work they like, I can stay here, going old and everything, without...without anyone actually thinking, ‘Oh Gawd, she’s a bit, you know, she’s a bit past it.’”

Freelance illustrator and author.

Her relative invisibility – as a home-based illustrator and children's author – was seen as a potential asset. It meant that she could age discreetly, one step removed from the relatively youthful organisations which were employing her. At 52 years, she recognised that others - especially commissioners and other in-house staff - might begin to see her as too old for paid employment. The risk was that 'invisible' older freelancers could find themselves pushed to the periphery of the informal network, and thus reliant on an ever-diminishing group of people who had the power to hire their skills.

The British Film Institute Television Industry Tracking Study found that time spent maintaining and replenishing networks tended to decline with age among creative production workers in freelance and staff positions (Dex et al., 2000). Less than half (47%) of respondents aged 50 years and over spent time maintaining job-seeking contacts, compared to 73% of panel participants who were in their 20s, 63% of those in their 30s and 55% of 40s (Dex et al., 2000, p. 299). Whilst the older age groups might be relying on networks which had been built up over many years, such patterns suggest an increasing distance with age from active network hubs.

Equally, reputations could become tarnished over time. One freelancer had found that his experience as a producer-director had been a disadvantage in his search for work. (See Box 6.2., a case study of the producer-director, on the next page.) He was aware that his considerable track record in certain types of documentary programme-making, and his reputation as an experienced hand, had hampered rather than helped him win commissions.

"... the fact that you had a very clear image of what you'd done was a disadvantage. It wasn't an advantage. The commissioning editors of (the national terrestrial broadcasting network) were... wanted to be revisionist. They wanted to be different and they developed a kind of mental image of young people that they wanted to work there. And it doesn't mean that older people didn't get any jobs. But if they did, it tended to be through some connection they had previously. Little connections... ...Those were the most important things."

Freelance producer-director & author.

Without these 'little connections', meaning contacts with the right people in the right places, his approaches were futile. He was stereotyped as a certain kind of producer-director, capable of delivering certain kinds of (dated) products.

Box 6.2. A Case Study of the Freelance Producer-Director:

The following case focuses on a freelance producer-director who had worked for many years as a presenter, producer and director at one of the major ITV companies. He had been regarded as a highly experienced and successful programme-maker and was now freelancing in the broadcasting sector. His name had been put forward as the series producer of a new social history documentary series, and this appointment had been endorsed by the originator of the series and by the independent production company commissioned to make it. The series had been accepted by the commissioning editor, but the freelancer's role had not. The freelancer offered the example as "a chilling story" of, firstly, his lack of bargaining power as a freelancer, and, secondly, the way his prior record and experience had appeared to work against him.

The news of the commissioning editor's decision had been relayed to him by telephone by the programme's originator. The freelancer decided to query the decision:

So I wrote to (the commissioning editor) and said, 'Would you explain why?' And eventually I got a letter back saying they didn't think I'd deliver the visual style they were looking for. So I thought well... ..that was the end of that. Because you can't argue...

The decision had perplexed him. Not only did he regard it as unjust and irrational, but as misunderstanding the skills and expertise he could have brought to the series. He had had the support of the programme's originator and the independent production company. But the commissioning editor had the power of veto and was under no obligation to justify or defend their decision.

The rejection had been a financial and professional blow.

...it lost me what in effect would have been a fascinating year's work, a book and maybe sixty grand... ..I remember coming home afterwards and I was just absolutely devastated. And also the fact that there wasn't – if when I'd turned on the programme it had been, you know, modern style, wonky camera, like that, I would have thought, 'Oh yes, I see what they mean.' Because I would never do that and they're quite right. But it wasn't... ..So that's very difficult as well, really. And you don't have, it's very difficult to deal with that. Because you think, 'What am I supposed to do now?'

The letter of explanation from the commissioning editor had been hard won. But when it finally arrived, it had been evasive and unhelpful.

...I really had to hammer it. I rang and phoned and rang and phoned... ..I kept ringing up and talking to the assistant. And I kept writing. And I've got the letter somewhere. It's only about three lines, you know. It says something like, 'Of course I respect your ability, etc, but I didn't think you'd deliver the visual style that I was looking for.' And, I mean, this was before anyone had worked out what the series was about. What was in it. You know, you don't work out the visual style before you begin, anyway, so it was load of old nonsense.

The freelancer found it a puzzling episode. He was unable to explain the motives behind the decision. The commissioning editor had offered the minimum of information. The lack of a close working relationship had meant that he was not privy to their reasoning. He felt it was futile to take matters further. It would not have...

Box 6.2 cont./-

...secured him the post that he had wanted, and been offered, and it might have jeopardised future relations with his colleagues within the independent production company.

The encounter had suggested to him that his prior reputation and lengthy experience in the industry had, in this instance, been a handicap rather than a bonus. This realisation had been slow to dawn but he felt the evidence increasingly prevalent as he looked back on his six years as a freelancer and independent producer. It was in sharp contrast to the independence and status he had been afforded at the ITV company where he had worked for many years. His record of achievement as a programme-maker and writer had now proved of limited help in securing a regular income and a vibrant career in his 50s. *"It's almost like you're, sort of, posthumous, really."*

6.6.2. Satisfying clients' needs on availability, delivery and skills

Clients needed their freelancers to be available, flexible and willing to adapt to their requirements. This meant keeping abreast of technological change and offering services which were deemed to be contemporary and relevant. Freelancers who were seen as 'behind the times' in terms of fashion, expectations or skills could find it hard to remain in work. Interviews with older freelancers revealed the importance of remaining focused on the client and the wider marketplace.

Freelancers were expected to organise and finance their own training, but there were disincentives to doing so, due to the costs and time involved. There was pressure to master new equipment rapidly, since it was usually done in the freelancer's own time. According to previous research, older freelancers were less likely to have received training, or say they needed training, than their younger counterparts (Woolf and Holly, 1994, Table 4.2, p. 56-7, Varlaam, 1998, Table 3, p. 20 & Table 12, p. 31, British Film Institute, 1995, Table 5.8a, p. 29, British Film Institute, 1997, Table 3.6b, p. 17). Whilst 28% of freelancers in their 20s had been on a training course in the last 12 months, only 11% of the over 50s had done so (Varlaam, 1998, Table 12, p. 31). Such patterns are symptomatic of wider trends in training among older workers in the UK (Platman, 1999). Given the work experience of older freelance professionals, it is perhaps unsurprising that they felt less in need of training. However, such patterns are troubling given the rapid changes to processes, systems and technology within the industry. In new media, for instance, software 'cycles' between upgrades were as short as three months (Gill and Dodd, 2000, p. 31).

The older freelance computer applications developer featured in the preceding section felt the speed of innovation had been so rapid in computer programming that it had been impossible for him to keep up. He was happy to position himself in a more supportive role, maintaining computer systems with which he was familiar. He had been brought in by his former lifetime employer initially to help develop and work on a human resource (HR) software system. That system had been replaced and it was only a matter of time before he was, in effect, redundant, unless he re-equipped himself with new skills. He was unwilling to do this and was resigned to the consequences, that his freelance assignments would eventually “dribble into the sand”.

“... programming, it's like maths really is. It's a young man's business. And I'm already past it as far as a lot of the modern programming techniques and so on are concerned. I just can't keep up with it. I mean some of these wizards now who write the Internet web stuff. I mean, I expect I could do it but I don't, I wouldn't really want to spend the time learning. So I'm really having to, although I like learning new things, I mean, there is such a volume of stuff now to learn, if you're going to keep up with it. So if I was really going into the market, you know, I'd have to do so much work.”

Freelance computer applications developer.

He felt he would need to spend an unacceptable amount of time updating himself on technological advances. He acknowledged that the result of this decision would be an eventual end to his freelance work. He had specialised in a computer software system which had been superseded by more advanced systems.

“... this new HR system has come in. Well, of course, that's removed a huge chunk of work which I... because the new... I can't do anything on the new system. So, there are still some residual units or systems which I look after which are still giving work at the moment... And, you know, I think that's probably the main reason it will dry up.”

Freelance computer applications developer.

Another example is provided by the freelance photographer who was interviewed for this study. He had invested £2,000 in computer equipment when he retired from his main employer, but after 18 months, still felt that he hadn't mastered it. In addition, he was aware that news photographers were using digital technology with which he was unfamiliar. Although such equipment was not essential to his speciality of celebrity, feature and fashion photography, it had added to his sense of remoteness.

Interviewer: "What about the technology? Does that, do you feel that's moved on?"

Freelancers: "Ah. Yes, that's the thing that I'm nervous about. I'm not a technical... When I retired, I thought: 'Right, I'm going to become computerised and get all this kind of thing.' Spent £2,000 on equipment upstairs and still haven't really learned (it) and can just about do an internet letter on it. But modern technology now is... .. they go on jobs and within five minutes of taking the picture, it's on the desk in the office, you know. I think that is, I'm not equipped like that you know... .. Which even makes you, I don't know, gives you that even bigger complex of, it makes you feel even older, you know..."

Freelance photographer.

He had contemplated buying a digital camera, but it had seemed a costly and risky investment. He was unsure whether it would enhance his employment prospects and, thus, whether he would recoup the costs. As the following passage shows, he knew that, in addition, it would take a substantial amount of time before he could become familiar and comfortable with it.

Interviewer: "Did they feel like an extension of yourself - your gear?"

Freelancer: "Well, they are, you know, they're... Like, for instance, say, I've got a camera that is so technically way above my old Fleet Street things, I've never used it. I've only had three films through it. It's worth a lot of money. It's one of the cameras that they wanted back. No! That camera really

wasn't, isn't my personality yet, you know. The other ones are. Got a few dents on them."

Freelance photographer.

Freelancers might be able to master new skills or equipment, but it took time before they felt sufficiently competent. Where a freelancer was reliant on the latest computer or technical equipment, they could feel disadvantaged by the speed of change and the cost of keeping up-to-date.

In the first section 6.3. of this chapter, freelancers looked to retirement as a time of selective withdrawal: being able to take on the most stimulating and creative assignments, and working at a more controlled pace. However, it appeared that freelancing did not lend itself to such manipulations. Even the computer applications developer cited above – who felt his freelance career had gradually declined in a satisfactory manner – had been wary of taking time off when it was inconvenient to his client. Freelancers could never predict accurately when their next assignment would arrive, how long it would last and how intensively it would need to be undertaken. Turning away jobs that appeared undesirable risked terminating a potentially useful and important flow of work. One freelancer described the gamble involved in cutting back. Aged 63, he wanted more free time; felt overwhelmed by the volume of work. But he said it was hard to know which client or which work to stop.

"I would actually like to get... like to do less. It's a bit like Lord Leverhulme, who said: 'I know that half my advertising is a waste of money but the only trouble is, I don't know which half!' I'd sort of like to give up half of it but I don't know which half one could or should give up. It's a bit like that, isn't it really, you know. (Laughs)"

Freelance broadcaster, writer & communications consultant.

It was a dilemma. Did he do less of the poorer paid jobs and risk turning down some of the most interesting assignments, or did he do less of the least satisfactory jobs which might pay the most. He could not predict the impact of turning down certain assignments. It made him suspect the actual degree of control which he could exert:

"... prima facie it looks, you know, it looks as if you're in control... . But I wonder how... is it a bit illusory, really? Are you in control? Because I don't, I mean, you know, it seems as if you're in control when you say, or it seems as if you have a different kind of attitude when you're (saying): 'I can do anything. I don't know what's going to happen. This weekend, I might have to nip off to Rome and have a real fun time doing this.' And so on. You could look at it that way or you could say, 'Well, I've got some things I'm going to do this weekend.' And if the call comes, I probably won't be able to do them. So it's an odd concept this one of control..."

Freelance broadcaster, writer & communications consultant.

Although he enjoyed his freelance career, and preferred it to his 10 years as a member of staff, he doubted whether he could exert that much control if he wanted to retain clients and maintain a viable freelance career.

Box 6.3. The case study of the freelance photographer

Section 6.3. of this chapter featured the case of a freelance photographer who had been forced to retire by his employer, a national daily newspaper, at the age of 65. He had been able to continue in paid employment by becoming a freelancer, working regularly for his former employer. He had been allowed to keep his camera equipment; had negotiated a security pass to give him access to his former employer's building; and had agreed to work during the week only. The arrangement had suited him well. He was earning "a tidy fortune" photographing fashion, features and celebrities. Later, he added another client: a Sunday newspaper where a former colleague was now the picture editor.

However, the arrangement was not to last. Fourteen months after his freelance career begun, he had a serious heart attack. He was 66 years old. He stopped working, received medical treatment and, after a year, felt ready to return to freelance work with his former clients. But, by then, contact had virtually ceased. The research interview took place two months later, at a time of uncertainty over how he would resume his freelance career. Asked how he planned to return to freelancing, he said:

I would just love to be phoned up and to (be asked) by either the (daily newspaper) or the (Sunday newspaper) or whatever and say: 'Look, how are you now? Are you, do you want to get back into business again?' You know. If they did that, I'd be straight down to (their offices).

They had not made telephone contact, though, and he was asked what had stopped him making the first approaches.

Freelancer: I've now got to a stage when I'm rather nervous of walking into the (daily newspaper) and say: 'Hi, do you remember me?' And they might look...

Box 6.3. cont./-

...at me and say: 'Piss off!' You know, this type of thing...

Later in the interview, he says:

I used to get massive great big things of flowers and fruit from the editor and different people. But... I dream about it. It, I've a lot of nightmares of, well, the kind of, well, if I phone them up and, you know, they say... 'Who are you?' You know. 'Never heard of you.' This kind of thing, you know. 'You're too old.' (Laughs)

Related to these feelings of remoteness and advancing age were his concerns about his health and his knowledge of the current technology. He was aware that digital photography had become common, although it was not essential to his fashion and celebrity work. He felt it would be difficult to become adept at the technology without buying costly equipment and spending a considerable amount of time learning how to use it. Also, he had been warned to take care of his health. His equipment was heavy and often required lifting and carry up flights of stairs.

Yet, he wanted to carry on working. He needed the extra money, in order to supplement what he saw as an inadequate occupational pension, and he wanted the creative fulfilment that came with his photographic work.

I'd be happy just to do three or four jobs a week. Yes, quite frankly it would just give me the adrenaline thing. And also adrenaline and money. A little bit of money. And to feel that you aren't at the end of your life.

6.6.3. Earning an adequate income

For the majority of older freelancers, pressures had intensified in the media industry and rewards had diminished. Many clients demanded faster turnarounds and a more intense way of working, but offered only limited increases in fees. Occasionally, freelancers spoke of surprising generosity from clients – an unexpected ex gratia payment or a rise in their fees. More usually, freelancers were aware of the growing disparity over time between their experience and their financial rewards.

There had been a trend towards piece, rather than hourly, rates and this had served to 'cap' the amount of income a freelancer could receive for a job, irrespective of the time involved. In the broadcasting sub-sector, there was anecdotal evidence from key informants of younger individuals prepared to work for next to nothing to secure experience in production. Two producer/directors quoted in the TV Tracking Study's third report commented that shrinking budgets had led to them "sponsoring the budget" and "subsiding the series" with their own time (BFI Centre for Audience

and Industry Research, 1999, p. 44). Similarly, in the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sub-sector, relatively inexperienced freelancers were willing to accept low rates in order to attract new clients and establish themselves in the industry.

A survey of freelance journalists found that the youngest and oldest enjoyed the lowest financial rewards (Baines, 2000). Low earnings were reported as common for professionals approaching retirement age; those freelancers aged 55 to 65 years were the most likely age cohort to earn less than £10,000 a year (Baines, 2000, p. 4). A similar age-related pattern was found in the earnings capacity of writers. A survey of members of the Society of Authors found low levels of income among a sizeable minority of its members, but the oldest freelancers were reliant on especially low pay (Pool, 2000). Only 15% of authors aged over 65 years felt they made a living wage from their writing, compared to 25% of those under 65 (Pool, 2000, p. 60).

The low fees were a source of frustration not only for longer serving and more experienced freelancers, but also for commissioning editors. In response to a final, open-ended question about issues of concern to them, two employers volunteered the inadequate rates for freelancers:

- The talent manager of an independent production company felt broadcasters had been unable to offer rates which compensated for the intensity of the workload during assignments and the overheads incurred by freelancers.
- The features editor of a national daily newspaper said she was embarrassed by the poor rates paid to her freelance feature writers. At £200 per thousand words, she was offering the same fee for features now as she had been earning herself as a freelancer 13 years earlier.

This was expressed well by a younger freelance feature writer, frustrated by the apparent ceiling on his earning power.

"... I think the real... the low for me, the low for me is something that only occurred to me recently, which is that I'm conscious about... that I'd like to earn more money and I can't. Because unless you're Christopher Hitchen or, you know, somebody with that sort of name, there is a standard rate for articles, you know, and you're not going to get above it. So the only way I can earn more money is to write more articles, so i.e. working harder.

"So it's not like, you know, friends of mine, who are barristers, who can actually, suddenly say one day, 'Well, actually, I'm going to charge you two hundred pounds for my time instead of one hundred, because now I'm more experienced and made a name for myself.' So that is quite a... If anything makes me want to move out of freelance journalism, then that's one of the things, I think. That feeling that there's very much a, sort of, close gearing between the amount of work and the amount of money. That it's not one of those businesses where, in fact, as your experience and your stature grows, you can do the same amount of work for more money."

Freelance feature writer, aged 36.

This writer had felt unable to demand more than the going rate for his features. He sensed that this would fuel a growing disenchantment and frustration over his freelance career. He saw a limit to the number of hours he was able to work in any one week and, unless he became a celebrity, this meant he would be unable to increase his earnings very much in the years to come.

Further evidence is provided by a freelance publishing consultant, writer and editor, aged 58, who believed he had earned a reputation for salvaging book projects. He had detected an increasing need to do so, as publishing companies had been forced to produce more books amid resource constraints. Yet, despite his ability to "rescue" projects with "fairly nightmarish" deadlines which "really had gone rather off the rails", he was unable to demand anything more than a marginal premium. As a result, he was only just staying solvent, despite his skills and experience. He felt the union's minimum daily and hourly rates were "mythical" in the publishing sector. He was charging the maximum that he felt he could get away with, and still retain the client. But given the precision needed for his work, and the pace at which he was able to go, he felt there was virtually no room for financial increases. He wished he were able to work faster, but could not risk handing in substandard work.

Further support for this comes from a study of freelance editors and proofreaders, which found that 'billing times' were limited by the intense nature of the work (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995).

Freelancers needed regular breaks and this reduced their hours of productive, paid labour.

The publishing consultant quoted above felt, as did another older freelancer working in the same sector, that these limited earnings had been a disappointment in their freelance careers. They felt they had deserved a higher standard of living given the expertise they had brought to bear and the projects they had undertaken. Any notion of success as a freelancer had to be qualified:

Interviewer: "...looking back at the ten years, would you say that you were a successful freelancer?

Freelancer: "(Pause) Well, I suppose all I can say is that... what a friend of mine said, 'Well, you kept afloat.' (Laughs.) Kept afloat in what style? I suppose I feel... well what I actually feel is that I'm fortunate to have been able to work more or less sort of consistently during those ten years. And I know quite a lot of people who don't, you know, don't seem to have been able to do that. So I suppose, in that sense, you could say successful but what would I mean by successful? I think I'd mean that... (a) rather sort of higher sort of standard of life (than) I'd been able to have perhaps... for what we've done. For the hours we've put in, the sort of the, well, I suppose, the experience that we've been able to bring to bear on what we do. In that sense, I don't feel that I've been successful, really. No. I feel I should have, in financial terms anyway, been more successful."

Freelance feature writer & publisher's reader, editor and copywriter.

Older, experienced freelancers were aware that they could be more expensive than their younger counterparts. There was a tension between wanting to charge what they felt they were worth, and wanting to offer competitive rates. A number of older freelancers had been in senior posts in media organisations before their freelance days: one had been a senior producer-director for a large ITV company; another, a literary editor for a national newspaper; a commissioning editor for a publishing house; a chief personnel officer for a corporate division; and a head of public affairs for another major ITV company. These were well-paid jobs with status and responsibility. Yet, as freelancers, they could only charge what the market would bear.

6.6.4. Cultivating productive and harmonious relations with clients

Where commissioners were less experienced than freelancers, there could be tensions in the relationship. It was galling for freelancers who had been operating for some considerable time to be offered inappropriate guidance, mistaken fees or unappreciative comments. For older freelancers, there was the feeling that, as they aged, the commissioners appeared to be getting younger all the time. Freelancers could feel increasingly out of step with the preoccupations of their (ever-younger or comparatively younger) commissioners.

Freelancers also mentioned the lack of appreciation of the role they played as a source of frustration. This was most apparent when the commissioners were *"... putting things out in a disorganised, last minute fashion and so on. And I think people who do that, on the whole, probably, because they're working under intense pressures, don't always understand what is involved in the work and so, in a way, don't fully appreciate the work that is being done for them."* Individuals felt commissioners could be insensitive to the pressures under which they, as freelancers, operated.

A discussion between five freelancers in the broadcasting sub-sector dwelt at length on their concerns over a lack of the most basic management training for individuals who had the power to hire them. It was the consensus among the group that commissioners generally needed a much better understanding of the way freelance skills should be nurtured. This comment was made by one of the older members of the group:

"You're just expected to come and do the job and (clicks fingers) on you go. You know, sign off. But you go, 'Hang on a minute. It's more than that. We're bringing experience, wisdom, talent, knowledge, creativity to your company. Excuse me.' And I'm in my 50s too and I see - and I'm not being ageist about this - but I'm sorry, (I've been) 35 years (in the industry and people are) trying to tell me what my job is. I mean, they just don't have... they've not been on board long enough. So there is a real problem there of age gaps..."

Freelance producer-director and training consultant.

He felt his freelance skills had been devalued by the insensitive attitudes of clients. Rarely did they seem to understand the degree of expertise and commitment which he and other freelancers like him brought to projects. Their dismissive attitude was harder to bear as the division between a freelancer's and a client's experience and age widened.

Older professionals were more likely to be disenchanted with changes within the industry, according to the British Film Institute Television Industry Tracking Study. This panel study found that older production workers were more likely than younger age groups to believe there had been a decline in industry standards over the four-year life of the research (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999, p. 46). The percentage believing there had been a deterioration in creative output was as follows:

- 46% of those aged over 50 years;
- 42% of 41-50 years;
- 30% of 31-40 years;
- 26% of 21-30 years.

Freelancers interviewed for this study reported an emphasis by employers on cutting corners rather than issuing fair and open terms of employment, and a reluctance to offer feedback about performance or to acknowledge the contribution made by freelancers. Given the short duration of many projects, and the high turnover of commissioners, experienced freelancers could find themselves 'beginning again', in effect, in order to establish their credentials and gain further work. It was a relentless process. The uncertainties and insecurities of freelancing appeared to remain in place, irrespective of a person's age or experience.

As one of the younger freelancers said, there was something unattractive about this continued uncertainty:

... I know of freelance journalists who are in their fifties and sixties and they're still wondering where the next commission is coming from. And I think: 'God, you know. I wouldn't like to be in that situation.'

Freelance feature writer.

6.7. Summary

This chapter has suggested that freelancing had the potential to offer individuals choice, control and autonomy in their working lives. By examining day-to-day exchanges, encounters, commentaries and concerns of individuals, we see that any depiction of control has to be qualified. Individuals needed to maintain both versatility and dedication to their work. They had to remain client and market focused in the way they offered their services and negotiated fees. Freelance life was endemically risky: abrupt endings were common. The lack of explanation or advance warning exacerbated the instability and volatility of work flow and earnings. Withdrawal of labour was one of the few bargaining tools at a freelancer's disposal, but using it risked alienating the client and jeopardising a source of employment. For older workers, freelancing could seem a relentless and increasingly unrewarding process. Without perpetual cultivation, older freelancers were in danger of becoming invisible, isolated and distant from hubs of work. They could also find themselves disadvantaged by age stereotypes and outdated skills, and poorly compensated relative to their experience.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

7.1. Introduction

This thesis has explored the contrasting perceptions and experiences of freelancers and their employers. How, then, can these be drawn together to answer the main intellectual puzzle, namely the question of freelance viability for older people? This chapter attempts this by using an analytical lens provided by Nikolas Rose in his work on 'the powers of freedom'. The chapter begins by detailing Rose's conceptual stance and then examining the freedoms which appear to apply to the older workforce. This is followed by a section on the blocks to these ambitions, in the form of organisational pressures, demands and practices. The chapter ends by suggesting that Rose's position gives insufficient attention to sources of social inequality in the labour market. By using the ideas of critical realists like Margaret Archer, we can see age as an important factor in mediating the experience of risk in freelance employment.

7.2. The Ethics of Freedom

In his essays on freedom, Nikolas Rose argues that choice, liberty and autonomy have become defining features of our daily lives (Rose, 1999). They underpin our values, permeate our relationships and shape our institutions. So pervasive are these notions that they have altered irretrievably our ethical and political ideas, systems, policies and practices.

"As the twenty-first century begins, the ethics of freedom have come to underpin our conceptions of how we should be ruled, how our practices of everyday life should be organized, how we should understand ourselves and our predicament."

(Rose, 1999, p. 61)

Freedom is not some aspirational state, according to Rose, but a condition of living. Neither is it optional. We are obliged to be free and are made so by a transformation of our attitudes and

values. Freedom is still 'a problem', a state to be wrestled with and fought over, but it is now of a different order.

"... the problem of freedom now comes to be understood in terms of the capacity of an autonomous individual to establish an identity through shaping a meaningful everyday life. Freedom is seen as autonomy, the capacity to realize one's desires in one's secular life, to fulfil one's potential through one's own endeavours, to determine the course of one's own existence through acts of choice."

(Rose, 1999, p. 84)

Freedom, then, is not an end in itself, but a practical and technical process involving self-mastery and self-determination. The price of maximum freedom, however, is maximum fragmentation and uncertainty. In the employment setting, individuals are forced to survive a workplace "saturated with insecurity" (Rose, 1999, p. 158). Work is no longer a permanent, lifelong contract, but "a vulnerable zone" where relationships are continually assessed and evaluated (Rose, 1999, p. 158).

Rose's analysis of freedom and its pivotal role in shaping contemporary society offers us a promising conceptual framework for this discussion chapter. Nowhere does freedom's potency appear stronger than in the freelance employment relationship, especially for older workers. Choice and control have been dominating themes in the preceding chapters. Rose's treatment is helpful in exposing the contradictions and competing realities of freelance employment for those engaged in its pursuit.

This chapter begins by examining the freedoms which freelancing appears to bestow on older individuals.

7.3. Freelancing and the freedoms of older workers

Section 6.3., in Chapter 6, has documented the attractions of freelancing in later life. Self-employed individuals were unconstrained by age-specific corporate employment policies and practices. In theory, older freelancers had discretion over the timing and nature of their retirement. Several

further freedoms follow on from this right to remain in paid employment beyond a premature or 'normal' exit from an organisation. Older people were also free to:

- earn fees in order to supplement a state benefit or an occupational pension;
- vary output, and thus earning power, according to lifestyle and health preferences;
- pursue stimulating and satisfying paid work in later life; and
- remain part of a professional community engaged in creative projects, irrespective of advancing years.

Again, in theory, older freelancers could pick-and-mix their assignments, clients and work schedules. They could juggle work with other interests or responsibilities, and build in free, discretionary time. They could concentrate on varied and stimulating assignments, and diversify and acquire new skills.

Such potential benefits have been expressed in a number of quarters. Management writers such as Charles Handy have portrayed portfolio careers as an inevitable and welcome development for older workers (Handy, 1991, Handy, 1995). Several authors of 'how-to-freelance' and general career guides have presented freelance work as a viable alternative to permanent, in-house jobs for the over-50s age group (Gray, 1987, Laurance, 1988, Greenbury, 1994, Marriott and Jacobs, 1995). Meanwhile, policy reports and discussion documents, published by Government committees, campaigning groups and the OECD, have highlighted the potential merits of a range of flexible employment opportunities targeted at older workers.

In general, the argument progresses thus: increasing economic inactivity among older people presents problems for individuals, organisations and Governments. At a time of population ageing, we cannot afford to let skilled individuals leave the workforce, since this leads to a waste of talent, a shortage of skills and an unacceptable burden on the pension and benefits system. Meanwhile, freelance and contract work has expanded; companies have shed sizeable numbers of their permanent staff. Freelancing is presented as a viable alternative to the lifelong, in-house career for skilled, older professionals (as well as for other groups) wishing or needing to remain in paid work. A freelance career is seen as one possible solution to the 'problem' of inactive older workers.

The lack of empirical research on the viability of such employment meant that such ideas could go unchallenged. The design of nationally representative employment surveys, the difficulties in studying mobile and fragmented types of labour, and the variable definitions of what constitutes flexible work has resulted in a paucity of material that could inform such debates.

The design of this present study also has its limitations. These are discussed in detail in the Research Methods Chapter 4. Two are worth highlighting again, briefly. Firstly, this was a cross-sectional investigation, with limited scope for follow-up interviews. Secondly, the study group was biased towards sustainability. Members were highly educated professionals operating in an industry with a history of freelance employment. Long-serving freelancers were 'survivors', unusual by dint of their extensive experience in this kind of work. Further research is needed to examine freelance employment patterns in contrasting industries and among individuals with different occupational backgrounds. Of particular merit would be a longitudinal study charting the changes in freelance employment over time.

Despite these limitations, this study was able to gain a composite picture of the pressures and opportunities represented by freelance working. For older individuals, freelancing appeared to lack obvious, formal barriers. There were no overt restrictions which prevented anyone, of any age, from pursuing and undertaking freelance assignments. Unlike redundancy and retirement provision within organisations, there were no official cut-off points to a freelance career. Unsurprisingly, then, none of the freelancers interviewed for this study expected to retire in the traditional sense of leaving paid employment at the age of 60 or 65. They saw freelancing as the medium by which they might control the nature and timing of their exit.

The blocks to freelancing for older people, and for other groups in the labour market, were more subtle and complex. They were to be found in the levels of remuneration, the allocation of contracts, the operation of informal networks and the perpetual cycle of work search and completion. Older freelancers, like their younger counterparts, were engaged in a process of relentless negotiation in order to survive the uncertainties of a flexible labour market. Individuals needed to remain constantly committed, productive and visible. Those older individuals who were 'fading' and losing 'energy' – to use Handy's terms (Handy, 1991, p. 148) – were far more exposed in the freelance labour market than in full-time employment. Abrupt termination was an inherent

risk: products, styles, technology and commissioning personnel changed. Labour market protection was minimal. The lack of constraints over entry and practice also meant a lack of mechanisms and standards designed to protect vulnerable individuals.

7.4. Freelancing and the freedoms of employers

But first, it is important to understand the organisational context. Employers who relied on freelancers were facing their own formidable pressures. Although the industry was expanding, competition had intensified. This had been due partly to deregulation and partly to new media platforms. The relatively stable organisational regimes of the early 1980s in broadcasting, for instance, had given way to a proliferation of new channels, outlets and suppliers a decade later, due to Government legislation underpinned by an apparent concern with choice and diversity for consumers. Managers who commissioned and supervised the work of freelancers were themselves in competition with other suppliers for contracts, products and services. They needed to demonstrate sound financial management and customer responsiveness, as well as to ensure reliable delivery and an appealing message. Their success depended on their ability to offer competitive packages or services, attract freelance talent at the time when it was required, and keep overheads to a minimum. Certain freelancers were in short supply and it was up to individual managers to ensure a continuous feed.

The ability to recruit casual labour represented a substantial freedom for employers. Freelancers could be hired at precisely the right time, and either for a specified number of days/weeks/months or for a set brief. Short, discontinuous contracts had spared employers the responsibility of holiday and sickness pay, training costs and, in some cases, office space¹. Where networks were established, employers could tap into a ready supply of temporary labour, without recourse to expensive recruitment campaigns. Uncertainty in the commissioning process, or sudden changes in client demand, could be handled by reducing or increasing the freelance labour supply. When

¹ In June 2001, the European Court of Justice ruled that the UK Government was in breach of European employment law by denying freelance workers and those on short-term contracts the right to four weeks paid annual leave (Dyer, 2001). The case was brought by the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) and centred on the UK's implementation of the paid annual leave entitlement under the European Working Time Directive, which came into force on October 1, 1998. The judgement meant that all workers were entitled to four weeks holiday, starting on their first day of employment, irrespective of how long the employment continued.

the work dried up, employers were free to sever links with their freelancers, either temporarily or for good. There were no redundancy costs or redeployment fees.

The responsibilities of the employer went no further than the terms of the specified contract. S/he was free to switch off the relationship without fuss or retribution. In addition, the brevity of most contracts, and swiftness with which they needed to be in place, meant that hiring decisions were generally free from the constraints which applied to full-time or permanent in-house positions. Informal networking was a common way in which freelancers were hired. This meant that, for the most part, employers were free to hire whoever they felt appropriate, without the justifications generally required of more open recruitment systems. Freelancers who were seen as unsuitable could be ejected without explanation. Freelancers were exposed to constant scrutiny and evaluated on the basis of each submission of work. Output which was deemed as unsatisfactory could lead to a swift termination. Employers wanted 'freelancers-to-go': ready-made, affordable and available experts who could help them deliver assignments on time and to brief.

Freelancers needed to be sensitive to this employment context. They did so by developing a customer and market focus – or a malleability – which allowed them to respond swiftly to prevailing employment opportunities. Those older freelancers who survived did so by being responsive to difficult assignments, working conditions and deadlines. They were cautious about setting over-inflated rates, taking holidays which were inconvenient to the client and rejecting promising new sources of work. Open hostilities were rare. Withdrawing labour, rather than haranguing the employer, was a more effective sanction. However, this could end in a pyrrhic victory, where the freelancer lost the client for good. The best protection appeared to be a shrewd understanding of, and adjustment to, the pressures faced by the employer.

7.5. The uncertainties of freelance employment for older workers

Even so, freelancing remained a precarious enterprise. The insecurities were bound up in the way fees were set and assignments allocated; in the speed of technological and organisational change; and in the lack of formal policies and statutory protection. These processes were not overtly discriminatory. Certain individuals, including older professionals, could be beneficiaries of the largely unregulated way in which freelance employment operated. Yet, their cumulative effect was

to isolate the more vulnerable members of the freelance workforce. Where skills were becoming dated, networks rusty and reputations tarnished, individuals were at risk of being pushed to the margins of the labour market. Under these circumstances, the work became a trickle, as did the income. The older individual then entered a state of entropy, where energy still existed but was lost for the purpose of doing work.

These insecurities will be examined in more detail. They fall, broadly, into five categories. Although relevant to all freelancers, regardless of age, it is argued that they could be especially damaging to the oldest and most experienced of freelancers.

7.5.1. *Informal networks*

The predominant way in which freelancers found work, and employers found freelancers, was through informal networks. An efficient network of personal and professional contacts could deliver the 'right' freelancer at precisely the right time. At its most productive, the informal network was quick, flexible, reliable and cheap. Former and current colleagues, rivals and friends could help to screen out undesirables, by recommending suitable talent or companies and warning against those less appropriate.

The informal network could grant a range of opportunities to the well-connected freelancer. Equally, it could be an insidious and unfair mechanism for work allocation. There was no guarantee that openings would reach the most suitable or committed of freelancers. *Unjust or inappropriate* choices could be difficult for individuals to expose and challenge, since they were often made without their knowledge. This had implications for those freelancers with the most experience and years' service. They could be seen as increasingly 'out-of-step' with their employers. As freelancers aged, commissioners appeared to be getting younger all the time. Where these commissioners were inexperienced, it could lead to tensions, embarrassment and irritation on both sides.

Employers were cautious of professionals who brought the wrong kind of attitudes, skills or approaches; who were 'old hat' or 'same-old, same olds'. Individual freelancers could find that their lengthy experience could be a handicap rather than an asset, as the case study of the freelance producer-director in Chapter 6 demonstrated. In this example (on pages 204-5), the individual's

work history and reputation had been an impediment in his search for commissions. Freelancers needed to be 'in tune' with those who commissioned their services and with the product or output.

In addition, it could be difficult for freelancers to maintain and expand their networks. Clients left, retired and changed jobs. Freelancers who were home-based tended to rely on email, telephone and fax communication, and it could be hard to set up face-to-face meetings with unknown or unfamiliar clients in order to establish trust and rapport.

7.5.2. *The limited nature of project work*

Freelancing was a temporary form of work with a finite duration. Individuals had to be constantly alert to abrupt endings and gaps between assignments. But these instant dissolutions could be hard to predict. There was no compensation for spells of inactivity. Even periods of ill health were self-funded, unless the individual had negotiated a contract with rights to sick pay or a private insurance policy. Freelancers could find themselves overwhelmed with work at one point and then under-employed the next. They needed to be instantly available in order to attract and retain clients; yet those same clients were able to sever links without explanation or notice. Most of the freelancers who took part in this study had experiences of sources of work drying up in an instant, leaving them with insufficient time to fill the gaps. Even if notice was given, freelancers involved in multiple tasks or projects could find it hard to spare time for work search, until the contract(s) had ended.

Given the short duration of many projects, and the high turnover of commissioners, experienced freelancers could find themselves having to 'begin again' in order to establish their credentials and gain work. It was a relentless process. The uncertainties and insecurities of freelancing appeared to remain in place, irrespective of a person's age or previous experience.

7.5.3. *Contemporary skills*

Freelancers needed to adapt their skills and abilities to suit the client and this often involved learning new technologies and acquiring new systems for a home-based office. It was rare for the employer to pay for training or new equipment, unless the freelancer was office-based, or

employed on a long-term contract. Training was costly and time-consuming for freelancers, and inherently risky, since a newly-acquired skill could become obsolete or fail to attract sufficient demand to merit the initial investment. Having dated skills, however, was equally damaging, if not more so. It could label the freelancer as out-of-touch and 'backward', and lead to a diminishing stream of work due to the finite shelf-life of the skill. Research by the media training organisation Skillset found that older freelancers were less likely to believe that they needed training and were less likely to have received it than other age groups (Woolf and Holly, 1994).

In the new media sector, for instance, software could be replaced every few months. Even in media sub-sectors where technological change was less rapid, it was important for freelancers to remain aware of shifting trends, fashions, images and styles. Freelancers spoke of switching markets, reinventing themselves and using different labels to describe their business. Freelancers who failed to keep abreast of developments were in danger of compromising their long-term viability.

7.5.4. Rates of pay

Unless a freelancer was a 'star turn' such as a celebrity presenter or writer, or had highly-sought after skills, there was a limit to how much they could charge. There was a ready supply of younger, cheaper talent. For instance, in the broadcasting sector, one estimate suggested that 30,000 students were graduating from media courses each year. Older and more experienced freelancers had to be careful not to price their services too high. In broadcasting, newspapers, magazines and book publishing, rates for most freelance work had been declining in real terms. Many individuals had seen a relative drop in pay, as budgets became tighter and capped project fees more common.

Whilst fees had dropped generally, the pressures had intensified. New organisational regimes, products and services had brought a change in expectations and standards. Research in the broadcasting sub-sector revealed the disaffection among professionals over the technical, ethical and factual quality of broadcast output (BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research, 1999), especially among older workers. Freelancing for older workers, then, could represent an increasingly strenuous and compromised endeavour, undertaken for ever-diminishing returns.

7.5.5. *Lack of formal support and protection*

Stories of conflict and intransigence among the freelance interviewees were relatively rare. This is unsurprising given the weak bargaining position of most freelancers. Where there was a plentiful supply of freelancers, employers could replace the 'unreasonable' with the more acquiescent. Union density had declined in most media sub-sectors and remained low in new media. Employers could disregard scales of fees which had been recommended by professional societies or trade unions. A number of freelance interviewees were union members, but enlisting the help of a union officer could alienate the employer and sour freelance relations.

None of the freelancers used personal agents at the time of the interviews. Even if they had done so, there were limits to how effective an agent could be in the face of employer hostility towards certain groups or types. For instance, a legal action in California, alleging age discrimination in the Hollywood film industry, cited agents as well as film studios as perpetrators of injustice (Shayne, 2001). Agents were accused of excluding older writers and actors, in order to comply with the known preferences of their clients.

However, a small number of freelance interviewees in the new media sector did rely on the services of recruitment agencies. These could provide a limited amount of protection, by guaranteeing payment for the duration of a contract and by lining up the next assignment in advance. But agencies would market only the most sought-after and lucrative freelancers and saw their role as serving their employer-clients, *not providing protection for freelancers*. Whilst the recruitment agencies involved in this study endeavoured to recruit talent irrespective of age, inevitably questions remain over the 'saleability' of older talent.

None of the formal or semi-formal sources of protection could act as a freelancer's individual guardian. Freelancers tended to rely on their own means for finding a regular supply of paid work. Their most common and valued source of support was an informal network of friends or peers or a supportive spouse or close relative. These were people who were near at hand, sympathetic and located away from the client's workplace.

7.6. Freedom as an illusion?

Given such insecurities, it would be tempting to dismiss the freedoms discussed earlier in relation to older workers as a deception. We might argue, for instance, that they were myths which had been conceived and promoted by vested interests for economic or ideological reasons.

Alternatively, we might see them as unwitting self-deceptions, played out and recycled unknowingly by the various members engaged in such pursuits. A third response is equally plausible, that the various interest groups - employers and older workers - are each striving to formulate and reach their ideal free state, but this realisation is impossible due to inherent conflicts.

By pursuing Rose's thesis further, it is possible to point to a fourth and more practical explanation. The quest for freedom may well have been an idealistic battle for control, involving submission or resistance. But, more importantly, it was a rationale for and an organising principle in the employment relationship. Here, then, freelancing becomes a set of practices, devices and activities in which all parties are active and accepting players. To join the game is to accept the rules, and each player's hand perpetuates and reinforces the next.

Research informants were clear on the injustices and insecurities of a freelance existence. They recognised and expressed openly the limits to their freedoms as freelancers. There were pay constraints, deadlines, expectations, changing markets and new technologies. Commissioners of freelance work could be unfair, thoughtless, neglectful, rude, impossible. They could also be generous, appreciative and empathetic. Whatever the setback or encouragement, freelancers were aware of the uncertainties and hostilities of a casual labour market. If they had once been naïve, these notions had long since disappeared in the daily practice of freelance working. The hazards were plain to see. Freelancing, then, was neither a state of self-deception nor the means by which people could engage in an eternal quest for the ultimate freedom. There were setbacks and successes, daily hardships and frustrations. But these were seen not as part of a grand struggle for empowerment, in which each conflict took them further towards or away from their final goal and where the oppressor was quite distinct from the oppressed. These daily struggles were not of the order of 'us' against 'them', the little person against the mighty employer or state, the exploited underclass versus the exploiting corporation.

Undoubtedly, there were times when individuals felt exploited, isolated and poorly represented. There were disputes between individuals and commissioners, trade unions and employers. There were instances of poor treatment and disadvantage. But the over-riding preoccupation of freelancers was to understand and navigate the day-to-day demands of their clients. It is important to emphasise that these clients were often former colleagues, friends, associates and peers. In some cases, freelancers who were fulfilling project work one day might recruit other freelancers the next. Commissioners could also be in-house freelancers. The lines were far too blurred to represent anything like a clear-cut division between workers and employers, exploited and exploiters.

In sustaining a freelance career, individuals were engaged in a practical exercise of negotiation and acceptance. They used multiple devices, as Sections 6.4. and 6.5. described in Chapter 6, to remain actively engaged in their chosen sphere. If they were to survive at all, confrontation had to be approached with caution. Choice and control might have been states to which individuals aspired, but they were separate from the daily devices and practices which constituted a freelancer's life. To reject, challenge and criticise the mechanisms by which freelancers earned their living was to question their role and legitimacy in pursuing this form of work.

Nevertheless, freelancing did deliver a measure of empowerment to the older individuals involved in this study. Each of the 14 freelancers aged over 50 years felt they were achieving at least one if not several of the freedoms described earlier in this chapter. A number of them were supplementing occupational pensions, savings or state benefits. One of the oldest freelancers, a computer applications developer aged 63, had been able to reduce his workload gradually as a freelancer, after a long-term corporate career. Older freelancers had, on occasions, undertaken stimulating assignments, learnt new skills and used their substantial expertise to deliver high quality work. When family commitments had dictated it, they had been able to juggle their freelance assignments to fit. They were free to tailor-make their working week, their mix of clients and the intensity of their jobs. Additionally, they hoped that they could delay retirement if they so chose and refuse assignments without jeopardising their ability to remain in paid employment.

With the benefits came substantial costs. Freelancing was a form of employment which, to repeat Rose's expression, was "*saturated with insecurity*" (Rose, 1999, p. 158). Set against the 'positive'

pole of freedoms outlined by Rose was the more significant 'negative' pole, where work was conditional and uncertain. As Beck outlines in his thesis on the risk society, work becomes a risk-fraught enterprise, devoid of many of *"its former assurances and protective functions"* (Beck, 1992, p. 140). Alongside freedom from a permanent, lifetime job was material insecurity and under-employment. The freedom to choose an effective portfolio also meant a perpetual concern over its components. Thinking in terms of risk assessment became an ongoing project, to which there was rarely a definitive solution (Giddens, 1991, p. 124).

However, the lens supplied by Rose takes us only so far. Freelancing as seen through a 'powers of freedom' perspective becomes a process of daily negotiation between individuals. Inevitably, this downplays the broader social, cultural and organisational constraints that may be operating in society as a whole and in the freelance labour market in particular. It is these sanctions and restrictions that the critical realist is at pains to expose and to which we now turn.

7.7. Freelancing and the power of critical realism

A fuller explanation of the critical realist position is to be found in Chapter 3, The Research Philosophy. Briefly, realists accept the fundamental tension between the intentions/activities of individuals and the (restraining) influence of social structures. As Margaret Archer says, *"an inalienable part of our human condition is the feeling of freedom: we are 'sovereign artificers' responsible for our own destinies..."* (Archer, 1995, p. 1). At the same time, such realists recognise the counter-balancing effects of forces that curtail such ambitions. Social structures endlessly transform and are transformed by social actors in a relentless, inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing cycle. Yet the 'morphogenetic' cycle (outlined in Chapter 3) is profoundly shaped by the social distribution of resources. There are limits to individual endeavour, in the form of institutional, positional and role-specific constraints. These factors, which may or may not be known to individuals, result in them being relatively privileged or under-privileged in their respective spheres.

Transferring these ideas to the freelance labour market, we might suggest that a person's bargaining position, and thus negotiating strength, is handicapped by inadequate networks, expertise and reputations. This, in turn, limits their ability to attract sufficient clients, work and income. Margaret Archer stresses that access to resources is neither fixed nor irreversible:

distributions change over time in the perpetual elaboration of structure by interacting agents (Parker, 2000, pp. 74-5). Nevertheless, the importance of reciprocal exchange in her view of the social world suggests that certain groups or individuals might be more vulnerable than others.

Those freelancers interviewed for this study who appeared to be thriving tended to maintain their 'social capital' (Coleman, 1994), meaning that their stocks of contacts, skills and abilities were high. However, as this chapter described earlier, this could become increasingly difficult as professionals aged. Informal networks dissipated, contemporary expertise dwindled and compensation diminished. Unless the individuals engaged in a constant process of replenishment and reciprocity, they could find themselves increasingly isolated in their pursuit of freelance employment opportunities. Thus, age could be an important mediating factor in the experience of risk in the freelance labour market.

7.8. Summary

The lack of formal rules and constraints which applied to freelance employment meant that older workers were at liberty to remain in the labour market as freelancers for as long as they chose. However, the paradox of freedom was that release from organisational restraint was, itself, restraining, since individuals were now responsible for their own welfare. Those older workers who survived did so by acknowledging and adapting to the needs of employers, and by engaging in a continuous dialogue with those who recruited and evaluated their skills and services. These older 'survivors' realised that their own making lay in no hands but their own (Brown, 1995, p. 24). Freedom was not a final destination, but a perpetual act of (re)negotiation. The insecurities and instability, however, could be overwhelming. Older professionals were vulnerable to diminishing rewards, dwindling networks and ageist attitudes. They were able to exert only limited control over their working lives, due to the need to offer flexible, affordable and skilled services to the paying clients on whom they depended. Individuals who were unwilling or unable to engage in such a process found their own form of release – by abandoning their freelance careers altogether.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

8.1. Research aims

Flexible employment has been put forward as a promising solution to 'the problem' of older workers. Such flexibility, the argument goes, may help to alleviate the social and economic hardships caused by population ageing on the one hand and economic inactivity among the 50 plus age group on the other. One type of flexibility – freelancing or portfolio working – has been seen as an attractive way forward for experienced professionals wanting or needing to work beyond premature or enforced exit from paid work. The idea surfaced with increasing regularity in policy documents and self-management career guides in the 1990s. Yet, research that explores and questions such a conjoined concept - of older professionals and their portfolio careers - is surprisingly absent. As a result, it has remained an alluring and relatively undamaged vision in the debate over labour market solutions for inactive older workers. There is a paucity of empirical evidence which can be drawn upon to support or question recommendations that this is a positive development for certain older professionals.

This research has tried to redress the gap. The aim has been to examine critically the myths and realities of freelance working for older professionals. It has done so by focusing on one industrial sector where freelancing is common, and by interviewing line managers, industry experts and freelancers with direct knowledge of such flexible working practices. It has also examined a diverse literature, including academic writings, policy documents, campaign reports, media industry profiles and self-help career guides, in order to gain a wider understanding of the position of flexible, portfolio labour generally, and of older freelancers in particular.

The research relied on two main theoretical positions. The first, based on Nikolas Rose's 'powers of freedom' thesis, was applied as a general analytical device to the rules of engagement between employers and freelancers (Rose, 1999). The second theoretical perspective, informed by the work of Margaret Archer and other critical realists, served to highlight the blocks to freelancing in later life. By exposing the wider structures operating in the labour market – social, cultural and

organisational – the critical realist gains a broader understanding of the barriers relevant to the oldest members of the freelance workforce.

8.2. Research limitations

This research was cross-sectional in design and the fieldwork conducted in one industry, in one geographical location, at one point in time. The study group was relatively small, at 51 individuals, with opportunities for repeat interviews fairly limited. The 14 freelancers aged 50 plus who took part in the research constituted what might be seen as a hardy ‘survivor’ group, unusual by dint of their still remaining in the freelance labour pool. The research was not able to track their progress over any length of time, nor to compare their experiences with other portfolio-type workers aged 50 plus in similar or contrasting industrial sectors in the UK or elsewhere.

However, despite these limitations, the research represents a substantial advance in our knowledge and thinking about portfolio-type jobs for older people. The remainder of this chapter outlines the positives and negatives of freelance employment and, perhaps more importantly, the deficiencies in the way freelance talent has been managed in the media industry. This has important consequences, firstly, for the ‘psychological contract’ between employers and individuals and, secondly, for the retention of valuable experience, knowledge and skills to organisations, as well as to the labour market as a whole.

8.3. Support for ‘the portfolio thesis’

The research did find some support for the ‘portfolio thesis’ among the oldest freelancers in the study group – at least at the time of the interviews. Freelancing did allow older people to exert a measure of freedom and control over their paid work in later life. It did seem to permit them to escape organisational constraints, such as restrictive management regimes, inhospitable work cultures and formal retirement policies. Where they had multiple clients, they could refuse an assignment without jeopardising other sources of paid work. They could continue to trade for as long as they chose, unhampered by official rules and sanctions which might have applied had they been members of staff.

8.4. Contradictions in 'the portfolio thesis'

However, accounts of freelancing among older, as well as younger, people revealed this to be a relentless, precarious and often unsatisfying form of work. There were many stories of exploitation, mismanagement and unfair treatment. Individuals were vulnerable to sudden unemployment, inadequate pay and poor treatment. Rarely did they receive in-house training or financial help in meeting the costs of skills updates. Yet, they were expected to offer optimum productivity during assignments, and to maintain high levels of energy, enthusiasm, commitment, reliability and competence.

Personal and professional contacts were critical to a viable freelance career, but these could diminish in number or fail to generate sufficient work of the right kind. Freelancers needed to maintain a sound reputation in the marketplace, but this could be hard to maintain for those who were associated with certain 'unfashionable' projects, clients or work histories. Contemporary skills were expensive to acquire for freelancers, but without them, individuals were consigned to a flow of work which would inevitably dwindle. Unless freelancers remained actively engaged in their industry, they were likely to find themselves increasingly pushed to the margins. Such pressures applied to all freelancers, but were felt to be particularly relevant among the oldest members of the freelance labour force.

The realities of a portfolio career fell short of the idealised impressions created in policy documents, career self-help guides and management literature, especially for older people. Freelance employment was neither secure, controllable nor necessarily lucrative. Older workers who attempted to self-manage a tailor-made presence in the labour market were hindered by economic and organisational constraints largely outside of their influence. A slow, calculated withdrawal, orchestrated to fit in with their own wishes, was largely impossible, due to the need to offer flexible, affordable and near-instant services to the paying clients on whom they depended.

Freelancing was an inherently risky form of employment for all members of the freelance workforce. However, the risks were experienced unequally. Those who were shouldering heavy caring responsibilities, suffering poor health or disabilities, in possession of dated or old-fashioned skills and out of touch with those individuals able to offer them work, were especially vulnerable.

Unless rapid and intensive action was taken to reverse declines in their portfolios of work, individuals found themselves in a downward employment spiral where contacts, skills and clients diminished, and their 'portfolio careers' inevitably came to a halt.

The lack of formal, enforceable industry-wide standards specifying freelance working conditions, pay scales, recruitment practices or contractual rights meant that freelance individuals were largely unprotected in the labour market. A number of interviewees were members of trade unions and professional societies; others used recruitment agencies, internet job search sites and job-matching services. However, none of these formal or semi-formal support systems could offer guaranteed protection against the vagaries of the labour market. Generally, individuals believed that their best defence was to cultivate productive and genial relations with clients, aided by friendship and family networks divorced from the workplace. Enlisting the help of lawyers or trade unions in order to challenge unfair practices was a risky enterprise, since it could alienate clients and sour effective partnerships. This placed individuals in a paradoxical position. They were vulnerable to exploitative practices, yet by protesting publicly they risked undermining their position even further.

Collective or collaborative working appeared to be rare in the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sub-sector. The majority of freelancers in this sector were one-person businesses, often working in competition with each other. The effect was to isolate them from sources of support. Team working was more common in the broadcasting and new media sectors but this rarely took the form of protective and powerful bargaining units. None of the freelancers in this study were using personal talent agents at the time of the interviews, although it would be interesting to explore the nature and impact of such relationships on employment viability and status.

8.5. The strategic management of freelancers

The position of these self-employed individuals – and especially those with the most experience – was further undermined by the lack of strategic management practices among media employers. In terms of the day-to-day supervision of freelancers, there seemed to be a lack of formal policies, codes of good practice or systematic management tools within organisations. Coupled with the absence of widely-accepted and enforceable industry standards, this led to highly variable

practices. Interviews with freelancers suggested that these varied not only from one employer to the next, but from one department or individual line manager to another. The ad hoc nature of freelance employment was, to some extent, an important facet for employers: they needed to have maximum flexibility and discretion over the terms and conditions of labour. But this also led to the inadequate, and more usually non-existent, strategic management of such human resources. Where agreed procedures existed, they were often poorly designed and evaluated. There were examples from freelancer interviewees of work being allocated to them by junior members of staff who had little understanding or appreciation of their role or expertise. These commissioners often lacked basic management training in how to:

- handle and supervise freelancers;
- offer proper feedback;
- regulate their work; and
- offer acceptable remuneration.

This lack of the most basic skills was keenly felt by freelancers of all ages, but for those with the most experience and longest memories in the industry, this ineptitude was particularly hard to bear.

Those who commissioned freelance work were operating under formidable pressures and had little time to nurture good relations with their freelancers. Their chief concern was to meet current deadlines and deliver the services expected of them. It was difficult for line managers to think strategically about long-term freelance requirements. Without clear guidance and direction from senior managers, the day-to-day management of freelancers was left to individual know-how. As a result, freelancers were frequently at the receiving end of a range of dubious management practices, including:

- unfair recruitment decisions,
- poorly specified briefs,
- inaccurate estimates of the amount of work involved,
- inadequate compensation for completed work, and
- insufficient feedback during and at the end of assignments.

There was an overall lack of transparent systems for locating and retaining freelancers or for making employers accountable to their freelance professionals.

8.6. The tenuous employment contract

Of far greater significance for organisations and individuals was the way freelance employment destabilised long-term partnerships. There were fewer incentives to build durable relationships built on trust, investment and commitment. Neither managers nor freelancers could be certain that there was a relationship beyond the present one. Managers might leave, change roles, revamp products and try out new freelancers. Equally, freelancers might find alternative clients, switch to different kinds of work or pursue other interests. This created an unstable, uncertain and tenuous 'psychological contract' between freelancers and their employers.

The resulting loss to organisations was potentially vast. Freelance labour contained valuable knowledge - of processes, crafts, ideas, contacts, approaches, techniques - which could not be accessed by the employer beyond the agreed time frame of the project or contract. This was especially relevant among the most experienced - and usually oldest - freelancers. As members of staff, their knowledge would have informed and influenced superiors, colleagues and customers. They would have acted as informal mentors, trainers and guides of younger and less experienced workers. Their experience was part of "the social reproduction of the workforce" (Roberts, 2001), by acting as conduits for institutional memory and professional skills. As freelancers, these older professionals had far less opportunity to disseminate their extensive knowledge to others who lay beyond their immediate project team. They were free, and often forced in their search for income, to take their skills elsewhere, including to competitors. Given the way experience was devalued by the industry, it is likely that substantial numbers of experienced workers left the industry altogether, resulting in a waste of expertise that had been built up over many decades.

The pursuit of freedom, developed at length in the previous Discussion Chapter, might have allowed individuals and employers to exert a degree of control in the employment relationship. But there was a price to pay. Short-term gains in the way careers and projects were shaped led to losses in long-term reciprocal employment arrangements. Experienced older professionals, in particular, were exposed to ever-greater sources of vulnerability in the labour market.

8.7. Issues for further research

1. If freelancing as a form of labour is to grow, as predicted by management writers, then there is an urgent need to seek effective models and codes of good practice in order to strategically manage such freelance workers. Further research should be undertaken to devise more open, accountable and productive methods for managing freelancers, especially those with lengthy experience and valuable skills.

2. Further research is needed into formal support mechanisms for isolated freelancers. Under the ESRC's Future of Work programme, Professor Edmund Heery and colleagues at Cardiff Business School are currently investigating trade union representation of non-standard workers, including fixed term contractors and the self-employed in the media and communications sectors¹. However, there is also a pressing need for research into the role of personal talent agents, web-based job sites, professional societies and recruitment agencies in promoting the interests of freelancers. How might these appeal to and aid older freelancers with substantial years' service in their industries?

3. There is a need for comparative research which assesses the potential of small-scale collectives and collaborative enterprises to offer economies of scale, shared networking and informal support for freelancers. Alternatively, web-based discussion groups may be more effective ways for freelancers to exchange information and seek support. Again, could these be designed to appeal to older members of the freelance workforce?

4. Action is needed to plug the absence of accurate statistics on the prevalence, availability and duration of flexible employment, and particularly freelancing, for the oldest members of the workforce. National and industry surveys need to extend the age range of samples and, on occasions, over-sample the over 50s and over 60s age groups in order to gain a much clearer picture of employment patterns in later life. It is also recommended that survey questionnaires be re-designed to cope with the more fluid nature of flexible work forms. This is likely to mean more

¹ The research project is due to be completed in July 2002. It is regarded as the first piece of academic research in Britain which examines directly the relationship between trade unions and workers with non-standard or atypical working arrangements.

open-ended questions which allow respondents to describe more fully the various permutations of their working lives. In addition, there should be a full and systematic review of the current definitions of flexible employment, so that more sophisticated and more universally applicable criteria can be used.

APPENDIX 01

Specialist 'how-to freelance' books

** Indicates a general freelance guide (i.e. not specifically about freelancing in the media industry).*

Hyde, Victor (1928) Freelance Journalism: A Practical Guide to Success, London: George Allen & Unwin.

Aldrich, H.B. (1935) Profitable Freelance Journalism, London: Hutchinson & Co.

Astbury, A.K. (1963) Freelance Journalism: A Practical Guide, London: G. Bell & Sons.

Hambleton, Ronald (1977) How I earned \$250,000 as a free lance writer... even if it did take 30 Years!, Ontario, Canada: Bartholomew Green.

Tracy, John & Gibson, Stewart (1980) (eds) The Freelance Book, London: BFP Books (photography).

Monk, Barry (1983) The Freelance Photography Handbook, London: Ebury Press.

Goldie, Fay (1984) Successful Freelance Journalism: A Practical Guide for Writers, Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.

Kerton, Paul (1986) The Freelance Writer's Handbook, London: Ebury Press.

* Gray, Marianne (1987) The Freelance Alternative, London: Piatkus.

Jones, Graham (1987) The Business of Freelancing (writing & photography), London: BFP Books.

Morrison, John (1987) Freelance Photography, London: David & Charles.

* Laurance, Robert (1988) Going Freelance: A guide for professionals, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Longmate, Norman (1988) 8th edition Writing for the BBC. A Guide to Writers on Possible Markets for their Work, London: BBC Books.

Powell, Michael (1990) Considering Computer Contracting? The Computer Weekly Guide to Becoming a Freelance Computer Professional, Sutton, Surrey: Computer Weekly Publications.

Morrison, John (1991) Freelancing for Magazines: A guide for writers and photographers, London: BFP Books.

Crofts, Andrew (1992) How to Make Money from Freelance Writing, London: Piatkus Books.

Dobson, Christopher (1992) The Freelance Journalist: How to survive and succeed, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Palmer, Robert (1993) 1000 Markets for Freelance Writers: an A-Z guide to general and specialist magazines and journals, London: Piatkus.

Wilson, John T. (1994) How to Earn £180 a Day as a Writer, St Ives, Cornwall: Weavers Press Publishing.

* Golzen, Godfrey (1995) Going Freelance: A Guide to Self-Employment on a Shoestring, London: Kogan Page.

Hall, Christine (1995) How to Be a Freelance Journalist, Plymouth: How to Books Ltd.

Horwood, Trevor (1995) Freelance Proofreading and Copy-editing: A Guide, Plymouth: Action Print Press.

* Marriott, Sean & Jacobs, Paula (1995) Perfect Freelancing: All you need to get it right first time, London: Arrow Business Books.

* Morris, Roz (1995) Working for Yourself: How to Succeed at Being Your Own Boss, London: Piatkus Books.

Moore, Chris (1996) Freelance Writing, London: Robert Hale.

Stevenson, Graham (1997) How to Write for Publication: An Introduction to Successful Freelance Writing, London: Arrow Books.

Baldock, Carole (1998) Making Money from Writing: How to become a freelance writer, Oxford: How To Books Ltd.

.Dick, Jill (1998) Freelance Writing for Newspapers, London: A & C Black.

* Holmes, Brian (1998) Successfully Going Freelance in a Week, Second Edition, London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Wimbs, Diana (1999) Freelance Copywriting, London: A & C Black.

APPENDIX 02

Research prospectus

The following research prospectus was sent to freelancers in advance of interviews. Slightly revised versions were also sent to employers and key informants.

MANAGING PORTFOLIO CAREERS

A Case Study of the Media Industry

This is a study of freelance professionals and their clients. It focuses on creative, technical and editorial professionals who are neither permanent nor full-time members of staff...

- How do freelances manage careers with multiple clients?
- How do they secure and retain work?
- What are their expectations and goals?

It also focuses on organisations and the way they manage freelance talent...

- What makes a successful freelance relationship?
- How do employers attract and retain freelance talent?
- How do they achieve flexibility and commitment from their freelances?

Central to the research is the way the freelance relationship is sustained by employers and individuals over time. Of particular interest are the importance of experience and age, and the relevance of retirement.

Why?... The workplace has changed. Many large organisations have restructured their operations and shed permanent, full-time staff. We hear of the advantages of flexibility for employers and individuals. What, though, are the realities? How do organisations manage the talents of people working on the 'outside', and how do those individuals manage that same process? The findings of the study have important consequences for business effectiveness and productivity, and for individual career management in a flexible labour force.

How?... The research involves detailed interviews with men and women who are self-employed, freelance or on contracts, and who are serving more than one client, either simultaneously or in swift succession. Interviews are also taking place with media industry employers. The research is being shaped largely by people who have experienced freelance working first hand. Their insights, reflections and concerns are seen as central. Their names will, of course, remain confidential.

Where?... The study will be conducted in the media industry, because of its tradition of flexible employment and its diverse industrial mix of large and small employers. It is one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK, and is seen by the Government as a valuable part of the domestic economy. The research

pta/-

will concentrate on four main sub-sectors: newspaper and magazine publishing; radio and television broadcasting; multi-media/computer software development; and communications/public relations.

When?... The research project is being conducted over three years with fieldwork taking place between October 1999 and November 2000. The research completion date is summer 2001. Participants in the study will be kept informed of findings and will be encouraged to engage in further discussion and comment.

The Open University Business School

The research is being carried out by **Kerry Platman** at **The Open University Business School**, one of the world's largest business schools. The study is part of the output of its **Human Resource Research Unit**, concerned with the organisation of work, innovation and change, ideologies and culture, and employment relations.

Kerry Platman has worked extensively for public and private industry, both as a researcher and policy adviser. She was a BBC employee for a number of years, working initially as a documentary programme-maker and later as part of its editorial and strategic policy team. She has a Master of Science (MSc) degree from King's College London and is engaged currently in a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree. Her research interests include flexible labour, portfolio careers, age diversity in employment, networked organisations and the cultural industries.

Her research is being undertaken in collaboration with **John Storey**, Professor of Human Resource Management, and **Phil Taylor**, Research Fellow, both at the Open University Business School. Professor John Storey chairs the Human Resource Research Unit and is a Fellow of the British Academy of Management, the Editor of the Human Resource Management Journal, and an Academic Adviser to the Institute for Personnel and Development. Dr Phil Taylor's research interests include labour market flexibility and the relationship between age and employment.

Contact details

Kerry Platman can be contacted by:

- email on K.Platman@open.ac.uk,
- telephone at her London base
- by post at the Open University Business School, Walton Hall,
MILTON KEYNES MK7 6AA

APPENDIX 03

Interview schedules

The three interview schedules which follow were broad guides to the discussions with freelancers, employers and key informants. These guides were revised regularly over the course of the research. The examples here give a general indication of the scope of questioning.

FREELANCE WORKERS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Individual history of portfolio/freelance working

- 1.1. Who are the main clients and what's the nature of the work for each?
- 1.2. How well do these components fit together? Is there synergy or conflict or discomfort?
- 1.3. Do you define yourself as freelance? When are you not freelancing?

2. Drivers & Expectations

- 2.1. Why did this freelance existence come about?
- 2.2. What were the expectations – and now the realities?
- 2.3. How much control is there: over pay, conditions and perks? Are you able to negotiate?
- 2.4. How choosy can you be about the kinds of jobs you take, and the way they're done?
- 2.5. What are the sources of job satisfaction & frustration?
- 2.6. Did you expect to be freelancing at this point in your life?

3. Managing the Relationship

- 3.1. What kind of relationship do you have with your clients/employers? What is the nature of this relationship? Is it close, face-to-face? Is it embodied in a written contract?
- 3.2. How do you measure your success? How do you gauge what's required?
- 3.3. Do you feel part of the organisation's 'loop' – for the sharing of information, the appreciation of company goals? Do you feel committed to these goals?
- 3.4. How do you think employers see you as a freelancer? How are freelancers seen generally within the industry?
- 3.5. How is 'experience' viewed within the industry? Do you feel your experience is valued?
- 3.6. What are the obstacles to a good relationship with your client/employer?
- 3.7. What are the advantages to you, and to the employer, of being freelance? And the disadvantages?
- 3.8. How do you sustain freelancing over time? What mechanisms do you use to find and keep work? How viable is your freelance career long-term?
- 3.9. Who would you, ideally, like to work for as a freelance?
4. How do you/will you maintain your skills & contacts?

5. Support systems

- 5.1. What kind of support systems do you have? These might be an administrative system in your home; a professional network; a friend or mentor... or all of these.
- 5.2. Do these networks help you get work?
- 5.3. Do you have a champion or patron in your freelance career?
- 5.4. What role has the union played in your freelance life?
- 5.5. How practical is co-operative working as a freelance?

6. The Media Industry over time

- 6.1. How have you been affected by the changes within the media industry?
- 6.2. How welcoming does the industry now feel? Do you feel part of the culture?
- 6.3. What kinds of choices do you have over sources of employment, within and beyond the media industry?

7. Retirement

- 7.1. At what point will you stop working? Does retirement at age 60/65 figure?
- 7.2. When will you feel past it, however you define past it?
- 7.3. What kind of pension provision do you have?
- 7.4. Will freelancing allow you a greater measure of choice/control over when, or whether at all, you retire?
- 7.5. Do you have a game plan for your 50s/60s? Or a general strategy for your career over the next 10-x years? What do you see as the future risks or threats?

8. Background information checklist

- 8.1. Name; Male/female; Date of birth
- 8.2. Contact details: telephone, email, home address
- 8.3. Occupation/profession; Qualifications

KEY INFORMANTS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Drivers & Expectations

- 1.1. Why do people freelance? Why do employers use freelancers?
- 1.2. What are the expectations – and the realities?
- 1.3. How much control is there: over pay, conditions and perks? Are they able to negotiate?
- 1.4. How choosy can you be about the kinds of jobs you take, and the way they're done?
- 1.5. What are the sources of job satisfaction & frustration?

2. Managing the Relationship

- 2.1. What kind of relationship is there between clients/employers? What is the nature of this relationship? Is it close, face-to-face? Is it embodied in a written contract?
- 2.2. Do freelancers feel part of the organisation's 'loop' – for the sharing of information, the appreciation of company goals? Is there commitment and loyalty on either side?
- 2.3. How do you think employers see freelancers? How are freelancers seen generally within the industry?
- 2.4. What are the obstacles to a good relationship between clients and employers?
- 2.5. Is it possible to achieve flexibility AND commitment?
- 2.6. How is freelancing sustained over time? What mechanisms are used for the matching of assignments and talent?
- 2.7. How viable is a freelance career long-term? What are the mistakes which individuals and employers make?
- 2.8. Is there a 'system' for managing the freelance labour market?
- 2.9. How are skills & contacts maintained? How SHOULD they be managed?
- 2.10. How is 'experience' viewed within the industry? Is it valued?

3. Support systems

- 3.1. What kinds of support systems are there for freelancers? These might be administrative systems; a professional network; a friend or mentor; agents, agencies, go-betweens.
- 3.2. Do these networks deliver work?
- 3.3. Are there champions or patrons in a freelancer's life?
- 3.4. How practical is co-operative working as a freelancer?

4. Retirement

- 4.1. Does retirement at age 60/65 figure for a freelancer?
- 4.2. What kind of pensions do people have?
- 4.3. Does freelancing permit a greater measure of choice/control over when, or whether, people retire?
- 4.4. Do people have a game plan for late career – i.e. their 50s/60s? Or a general strategy for their freelance career? What do you see as the future risks or threats?

5. Further contacts

- 5.1. Where would I find examples of best practice in the employment of freelancers?
- 5.2. What kinds of organisations would make interesting case studies?
- 5.3. Which are the patrons who might be interested in taking part in the research?

EMPLOYERS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- 1. How do you define a freelancer in your organisation?**
- 2. How much use do you make of freelancers in your day-to-day work?**
 - 2.1. How many freelancers do you employ each week or month?
 - 2.2. What's the nature of these freelance assignments?
 - 2.3. What's the length of each assignment?
 - 2.4. What kinds of skills & experience do these freelancers have?
 - 2.5. Are they given written or verbal contracts?
- 3. How typical is this use of freelancers in the organisation as a whole?**
- 4. Why do you use freelancers?**
 - 4.1. Do you have much choice in whether or not to use freelancers?
 - 4.2. What do you feel are the advantages & disadvantages?
- 5. What's your ideal freelancer?**
 - 5.1. What are you looking for in a freelancer (skills, experience, attitude, commitment...?)
 - 5.2. What kind of person thrives as a freelancer if they're working for you?
 - 5.3. When does a relationship with a freelancer really work? What are the essential components of a successful relationship between yourself and a freelancer?
 - 5.4. Do you try to establish a long-term commitment?
 - 5.5. How do you ensure quality work?
 - 5.6. How do you keep control of the assignment?
- 6. Do you have a system for managing your freelancers and their assignments?**
 - 6.1. How do you find your freelancers? Are they former employees, or established freelancers?
 - 6.2. How do you set their rates of pay?
 - 6.3. Do you specify what's involved in advance?
 - 6.4. How do you ensure that the best freelancers stick around?
 - 6.5. Do you offer training?
 - 6.6. How do you ensure that freelancers understand your aims and customer focus?
 - 6.7. In what way might the system for managing freelancers be improved?
- 7. What value do you place on experience and maturity in a freelancer?**
 - 7.1. Are there conflicts and tensions in dealing with highly experienced, older freelancers?
 - 7.2. Might there be times when a freelancer's lengthy experience is a handicap?
 - 7.3. Would you hire someone who was over retirement age?
 - 7.4. How should older workers position themselves?
 - 7.5. How will YOU position yourself when you reach 50?
 - 7.6. How welcoming is the industry to older workers?
 - 7.7. How many older freelancers do you employ?
- 8. Background information checklist**
 - 8.1. Company name
 - 8.2. Name & title of company interviewee: Male/Female, Age, Job title
 - 8.3. Nature of work & location
 - 8.4. Staff size, freelance input

APPENDIX 04

Employer and key informant job titles

Nine interviews were conducted with employers and a further 13 interviews with key informants. The following table describes their jobs. Employers were defined as those individuals who were in charge of a particular product, strand, section, unit or service and who had some management responsibility for freelancers. Key informants were defined as individuals with an overview of freelance employment in their sub-sector.

Table 04.1. Job titles for employer & key informant interviewees, by media sub-sector	
EMPLOYERS	KEY INFORMANTS
Newspaper, magazine & book publishing	
Editorial director, publishing house	Owner, news & photographic agency
Editorial director, contract magazine publisher	Owner, editorial services agency
Features editor, national daily newspaper	Union official
Features editor, weekly magazine	Training co-ordinator, professional society
Television & radio broadcasting	
Talent manager, independent production company	Owner, production services agency
Development manager, indep. production company	Trade union organiser
Information manager, broadcasting support agency	Trade association official
	Researcher & analyst
	Talent manager, television broadcaster
New media	
Creative director, design agency	Managing director, recruitment agency
Head of multimedia, design agency	Managing director, recruitment agency
	Trade union official
	Trade union organiser

APPENDIX 05

A profile of freelance interviewees

The freelancers interviewed for this research varied in terms of age, gender, caring responsibilities, job titles and employment history. The aim was to involve a broad and contrasting range of freelancers who would, in turn, offer many different perspectives on the process of freelancing. This section details the extent of this range.

05.1. Age & gender spread

The 29 freelancers involved in this study were aged between 27 and 67 years. As Table 05.1. shows, two thirds were in their 40s and 50s. Just over half the group (15) were men. This fairly even gender spread held for all the age groups except for the 60+ category, where the three freelancers in their 60s were all men.

<u>Table 05.1. Freelance interviewees by age, gender and media sub-sector</u>						
Age group	<i>Numbers in age group by gender</i>		<i>Numbers in age group by media sub-sector</i>			Totals
	Men	Women	A	B	C	
20-29	1	1	0	1	1	2
30-39	3	2	2	1	2	5
40-49	3	5	3	4	1	8
50-59	5	6	6	5	0	11
60-69	3	0	1	1	1	3
Totals	15	14	12	12	5	29

<u>Media sub-sector:</u>	
A	Newspapers, magazine & book publishing
B	Television & radio broadcasting
C	New media

05.2. Dependants

More than half of the freelancers had children, although only 8 of them (4 men and 4 women) had young dependants (defined here as under the age of 10). These individuals with younger children were spread across the age groups: 2 were in their 30s, 3 in their 40s and 3 (2 men and 1 woman) in their 50s (see Table 05.2.).

Table 05.2. Freelance interviewees with dependants, by age and gender						
	Male freelancers			Female freelancers		
Age group	Total numbers	With children - all ages	With children - under 10 yrs	Total numbers	With children - all ages	With children - under 10 yrs
20-29	1	0	0	1	0	0
30-39	3	1	1	2	1	1
40-49	3	1	1	5	2	2
50-59	5	4	2	6	5	1
60-69	3	3	0	0	0	0
Totals	15	9	4	14	8	4

05.3. Freelance work histories

The number of years spent freelancing varied widely between individuals. One women in her early 50s had freelanced for more than 30 years, whilst another, in her late 40s, was just beginning.

Chart 05.1. illustrates the spread of freelance work histories by plotting these against the ages of individuals. The majority of individuals (20 out of 29) had been freelancing for 10 years or less, and 12 of these had operated for under six years.

It follows that the older the freelancer, the greater the opportunity for a longer freelance career.

However, the chart also reveals a small number of people aged 50+ who had been freelancing for a relatively brief period.

Table 05.3. Freelance interviewees by years freelancing, gender & media sub-sector						
	Numbers by gender		Media sub-sector			
Years freelancing	Men	Women	A	B	C	Totals
0-5 yrs	8	4	5	4	3	12
6-10 yrs	3	4	3	2	2	7
11-20 yrs	2	4	2	4	0	6
20+ yrs	2	2	2	2	0	4
Totals	15	14	12	12	5	29

Media sub-sector:	
A	Newspapers, magazine & book publishing
B	Television & radio broadcasting
C	New media

Chart 05.1. (at the back of this appendix) and Table 05.3. provide evidence of the spectrum of freelance work histories among the freelancers who took part in this study. However, it is important to stress that they do not represent the spread of freelance experience in the media industry as a whole. More than likely, they exaggerate the range of instances, especially in the upper age groups.

05.4. Professional job titles

Freelancers were engaged in a variety of professional tasks and occupations. In the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sub-sector, jobs involved editing, illustrating, photography and writing. In the television and radio broadcasting sub-sector, individuals were directing, producing, presenting, props buying, consulting, training and project managing. In the new media sub-sector, they were involved in multimedia production, design, animation and software programming. Table 05.4. lists the 29 freelancers by job title¹.

¹ These titles were loose labels that broadly reflected the type of work undertaken. One freelancer in the broadcasting sector offered a number of different titles to cover her 13 years' freelancing: producer-director, communications consultant, training consultant, lecturer, development executive, editorial co-ordinator and manager. (Email exchange, 24.9.00.)

Table 05.4. Freelance job titles among 29 interviewees	
Broadcaster, writer & communications consultant	Multimedia designer
Buyer (film & television)	New media designer & developer
Computer applications developer	Newspaper photographer
Computer programmer & web producer	Producer/researcher
Editor, producer & training consultant	Producer-director & author
Editorial & marketing consultant, editor & writer	Producer-director & communications consultant
Executive producer (television)	Producer-director & training consultant
Feature writer	Production manager (film & video)
Feature writer	Researcher (television)
Feature writer	Publishing consultant, writer & editor
Feature writer & public relations consultant	Social policy consultant & media industry charity chair
Feature writer & publisher's reader, editor & copywriter	Sub-editor & writer
Illustrator & author	Web applications consultant & developer
Journalist & training consultant	Writer
Media regulatory adviser & change consultant	

05.5. Media sub-sectors

Tables 05.1. and 05.3. also give figures for the spread of freelancers across the three media sub-sectors. In the two sub-sectors of, firstly, newspaper, magazine & book publishing, and, secondly, broadcasting, there was a fairly even spread in terms of age, gender and number of years' freelancing. However, numbers of older and long-established freelancers were low for the new media sub-sector. This was especially so in the 50-59 age group, where it proved difficult to find men or women operating as freelancers. In addition, four out of the five new media freelancers were men. However, two of the new media key informants interviewed for the research were women, and both were in their late 40s or older.

05.6. Contractual variations

There were wide differences in the type and length of freelance contracts. Typically, freelancers who were producing, directing, researching, designing or programming in the new media and broadcasting sectors were engaged on continuous freelance contracts lasting several weeks or months. In contrast, feature writing for newspapers or magazines usually involved a one-article commission taking a matter of hours or days. That said, there were many instances of relatively fleeting commissions in the broadcasting and new media sub-sectors, and of lengthy ones in newspaper, magazine and book publishing.

More significantly, an individual's contract type could vary over time. It might be one of many similar or very different contract states, experienced either consecutively or simultaneously, such as:

- A one-off discrete piece of work paid by the hour, day or week;
- An assignment paid at a set rate on completion;
- A part-time contract as an employee;
- A contract specifying an end date.

The freelancers involved in this study varied the location of their work base, sometimes spending part of the week at home and the remainder at the organisation's office.

Five of the freelancers hired other freelance specialists to work alongside or under them in order to complete commissions on occasions. However, their main status was as self-employed individuals without employees. None of the freelancers employed permanent members of staff.

None of the freelancers was represented by a personal agent at the time they were interviewed, although two women in the newspaper, magazine and book publishing sector had tried agents for a brief period.

05.7. Income

Freelance earnings varied widely between individuals and from year to year. Interviewees were not asked for specific details of their income, but most volunteered information that gave a broad indication of their finances. This revealed a large disparity of earnings. Two freelancers aged in their 50s - a female media regulatory adviser and a male broadcaster, writer and communications consultant - were earning in excess of £55,000 per annum. A third freelancer, a 63-year-old computer programmer and analyst earned between £30 and £40,000 a year, excluding a £28,000 occupational pension. At the other extreme, there were freelancers who were barely making a subsistence wage.

05.8. Variations over time

As has been stated, there were variations over time in the nature of assignments, contractual arrangements and income. Even more noteworthy were the changes in employment status, industrial sector and client mix. Repeat interviews were conducted with 9 freelancers² up to 13 months after the first meeting. Informal exchanges also took place with a further 18 freelancers, either soon after the main face-to-face interview or some months later. Lack of time prevented the full and detailed follow-up interviews that had been envisaged in the original research design. Nevertheless, these supplementary encounters did convey the sudden and sometimes dramatic changes in freelance fortunes.

Twelve freelancers had experienced major changes in their employment positions during the life time of this study:

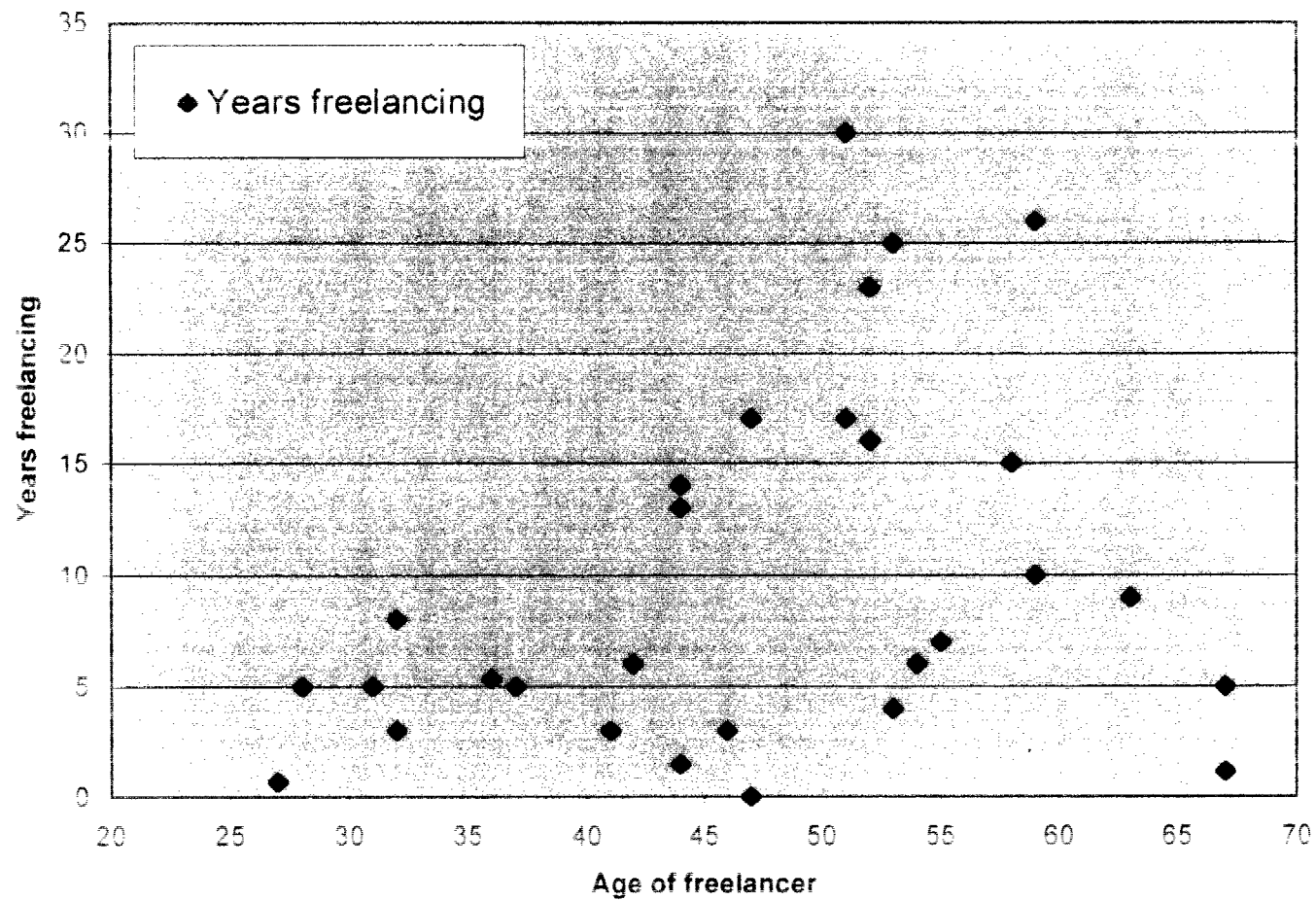
- 4 had left freelancing entirely in order to take up full-time jobs (3 women, aged 32, 37 & 47; 1 man, aged 46);
- 1 man aged 41 had set up a publishing company, becoming its managing director
- 1 man aged 51 and 1 woman aged 47, both in broadcasting, had been forced to stop freelancing for a limited period due to injuries sustained outside work

² Four of these freelancers were re-interviewed together during a roundtable discussion one year after the first interviews.

- 2 men aged 32 & 44 in the new media sub-sector reported periods of unemployment
- 1 woman aged 59 had reduced her freelancing so that she could accept a part-time job as an employee
- 1 woman aged 55 had left the media industry to freelance in the health sector
- 1 man aged 54 had switched media sub-sectors, from broadcasting to book publishing

It would have been preferable - but beyond the resources of this study - to have undertaken a systematic and more extensive follow-up of research participants in order to document in much greater detail the reconfigurations through which freelancers went.

Chart 05.1. Spread of ages and years freelancing among freelance interviewees



APPENDIX 06

Key to excerpts from interview transcripts

The enclosed guidance note explains the abbreviations used in the excerpts which appear in Chapters 5, Freelance Employment Practices in the Media Industry, and 6, The Freelancer's Perspective. These excerpts were taken from transcripts of interviews with employers, industry informants and individual freelancers.

The first part of the appendix provides a key to the use of pause 'dots' in the text. The second part gives an example of how two connected passages are brought together into one quote. The black ink represents the full transcript section and the red ink, the words which were finally lifted from the transcript.

Key to excerpts from interview transcripts

Symbol

Representation

... three dots at the start or end of a passage...	Means the excerpt begins part-way into a sentence or finishes before the sentence is complete.
Three dots ... in mid-passages	<p>Means the interviewee trailed off mid-sentence and either continued on the same theme or switched tack without completing the sentence. The passage below is an example of the 'three dot' form:</p> <p><i>"... probably it's easier to say things in a letter, isn't it, than actually face-to-face or phoning, 'cause I had to... I'm not very good, as you can tell, with talking and I'm falling over myself and sort of back-tracking and sort of... and going all round the houses. So it was a letter that rambled on about, sort of, 'I'd love to do another book but I am... I do feel, with the time, I really can't do it..."</i></p>
Two sets of three dots in mid passage	<p>Means the excerpt has been edited and two or more sections of text have been brought together. Missing parts were seen as: tangential points or phrases; words of hesitation; sentences deemed irrelevant to the point being made. On occasions, the device was used to erase an identifying name, whether of the interviewee, their friends or family, or their clients.</p> <p>Below is an example of two passages being brought together to emphasise the importance of flexibility for freelancers. It also contains one omission of an identifying name:</p> <p><i>"...I mean, if you look at my letterhead, I say something like: 'Communications, training and consultancy.' Which more or less covers virtually everything you can think of. So I don't, you know, I don't regard myself as a niche business in any sense... ..</i> <i>I would have thought for me, breadth of activity and flexibility have been the secrets, really. It's no use saying: 'I'm a broadcaster with and that's all I want to do. I just want to be heard behind the microphone.' Because if somebody wants you to write some sort of weird kind of thing, that you, that looks a bit prosaic but is quite lucrative, and you're not doing anything else, I've always done it."</i></p> <p>See overleaf for full section of transcript.</p>

Highlighted text (in red) forms the excerpt.

Interviewer: So what would, perhaps, distinguish you as a freelance is that you've got lots of clients that you're working for?

Freelancer: Lots and lots of clients. I think so. A multitude of clients and no fixed... I mean you know, you have a portfolio of skills but you don't actually say... I mean if you look at my letterhead, I say something like: 'Communications, training and consultancy.' Which more or less covers virtually everything you can think of. So I don't, you know I don't regard myself as a niche business in any sense. The... I mean, I think it's a freelancer with a few bells and whistles. Like being registered for VAT and having decent, you know, having a decent sort of image really. There's always something. But I can always be got, you know. (His wife)'s here the whole time so there's always somebody at the end of the phone. You know. I do a reasonably, sort of, professional job but not too many bells and whistles, really.

Interviewer: Has it been quite important over the years to have that broad umbrella? You say your letterhead covers virtually everything. Has that been useful?

Freelancer: I can't actually, Kerry, in all honesty... I know freelances who want to... I knew one person who was a very good writer and she wanted to be a freelance writer. And that's all she wanted to be. And after six months she got a job because she wasn't getting enough work. I would have thought for me, breadth of activity and flexibility have been the secrets really. It's no use saying: 'I'm a broadcaster with (X) and that's all I want to do. I just want to be heard behind the microphone.' Because if somebody wants you to write some sort of weird kind of thing, that you, that looks a bit prosaic, but is quite lucrative and you're not doing anything else, I've always done it.

REFERENCES

- AARP (1999) *Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement. Executive Summary Part 1*. Available from: [www.http://research.aarp.org/econ/boomer_seg_1.html](http://research.aarp.org/econ/boomer_seg_1.html), accessed May 18 1999.
- Ackroyd, S. and Fleetwood, S. (Eds) (2000) *Realist Perspectives on Management and Organisations*, Routledge, London.
- Aldrich, H. B. (1935) *Profitable Freelance Journalism*, Hutchinson & Co, London.
- Alvesson, M. and Skoldberg, K. (2000) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Alvesson, M. and Willmott, H. (1996) *Making Sense of Management. A Critical Introduction*, Sage Publications, London.
- Archer, M. (1982) 'Morphogenesis versus structuration: on combining structure and action', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 33 (4), pp. 455-483.
- Archer, M. (1995) *Realist social theory: the morphogenetic approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Archer, M. S. (2000) 'For structure: its reality, properties and powers: A reply to Anthony King', *Sociological Review*, 48 (3), pp. 464-472.
- Arkin, A. (2001) 'Flea enterprise', *People Management*, 13 September, pp. 44-45.
- Arrowsmith, J. and McGoldrick, A. (1996) *Breaking the Barriers. A survey of managers' attitudes to age and employment*, Institute of Management, London.
- Arthur, M. and Rousseau, D. (Eds) (1996) *The Boundaryless Career. A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Astbury, A. K. (1963) *Freelance Journalism: A Practical Guide*, G. Bell & Sons, London.
- Atchley, R. C. (1993) 'Critical Perspectives on Retirement'. In: Cole, T., Achenbaum, W. A., Jakobi, P. and Kastenbaum, R. (Eds), *Voices and Visions of Aging: Towards a Critical Gerontology*, Springer Publishing Company, New York, pp. 3-19.
- Atkinson, J., Rick, J., Morris, S. and Williams, M. (1996) *Temporary Work and the Labour Market*, The Institute for Employment Studies, Brighton.
- Atkinson, P. and Silverman, D. (1997) 'Kundera's *Immortality*: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3 (3), pp. 304-325.
- Atkinson, R. and Flint, J. (2001) 'Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies', *Social Research Update*, (33), pp. 1-4.

- Auer, P. and Fortuny, M. (1999) *Ageing of the Labour Force in OECD Countries. Economic and Social Consequences*, ILO, Geneva.
- Austin Knight (1996) *Towards a Balanced Workforce*, Austin Knight UK Limited.
- Baines, S. (1999) 'Servicing the media: freelancing, teleworking and 'enterprising' careers', *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 14 (1), pp. 18-31.
- Baines, S. (2000) 'Living in the age of the freelance: individualisation and insecurity in working for the media', *Labour Process Conference*, University of Strathclyde, April 25-27, 2000.
- Barry, C. A. (1998) 'Choosing Qualitative Data Analysis Software: Atlas/ti and Nudist Compared', *Sociological Research Online*, 3 (3), access via <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/3/4.html>.
- Baszanger, I. (1998) 'The Work Sites of an American Interactionist: Anselm Strauss, 1917-1996', *Symbolic Interaction*, 21 (4), pp. 353-377.
- Beatson, M. (1995) *Labour Market Flexibility*, Employment Department, Sheffield.
- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications, London.
- Beck, U. (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Becker, H. S. (1998) *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*, The University of Chicago Press, London.
- Bell, D. (1974) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, Heinemann, London.
- Benton, T. and Craib, I. (2001) *Philosophy of Social Science. The philosophical foundations of social thought*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, Hampshire.
- BFI Centre for Audience and Industry Research (1999) *British Film Institute Television Industry Tracking Study. Third Report*, British Film Institute, London.
- Bhaskar, R. (1978) *A Realist Theory of Science*, The Harvester Press, Sussex.
- Bhaskar, R. (1979) *The Possibility of Naturalism. A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, The Harvester Press, Sussex.
- Bhaskar, R. (1986) *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, Verso, London.
- Bhaskar, R. (1989) *Reclaiming Reality. A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*, Verso, London.
- Blaikie, N. (1993) *Approaches to Social Enquiry*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Blair, H. (2001) 'You're only as good as your last job': the labour process and labour market in the British film industry', *Work Employment & Society*, 15 (1), pp. 149-169.

- Bone, M., Gregory, J., Gill, B. and Lader, D. (1992) *Retirement and retirement plans*, HMSO, London.
- Boulton, D. (1991) *The Third Age of Broadcasting*, Institute for Public Policy Research, London.
- Bower, C. (2001) 'Trends in female employment', *Labour Market Trends*, February, pp. 107-118.
- Bridges, W. (1995) *JOBSHIFT: How to Prosper in a Workplace Without Jobs*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London.
- Briggs, A. and Cobley, P. (Eds) (1998) *The Media: An Introduction*, Addison Wesley Longman, Harlow, Essex.
- British Film Institute (1995) *British Film Institute Television Industry Tracking Study. The First Year: An Interim Report*, British Film Institute, London.
- British Film Institute (1997) *British Film Institute Television Industry Tracking Study. Second Interim Report*, British Film Institute, London.
- British Library (2000) *Legal Deposit in the National Published Archive*, British Library Legal Deposit Office, Wetherby, West Yorkshire.
- Brown, R. K. (1997) *The Changing Shape of Work*, Macmillan Press, London.
- Brown, W. (1995) *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Brownfield, P. (2000) 'Writers' Class-Action Lawsuit Alleges Age Discrimination', *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, California, October 24, pp. F2, F10.
- Brownfield, P. (2001) 'Writers' Lawsuit Still in the Prologue Stage', *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, California, June 10, p. 89.
- Burawoy, M. (1991) 'The Extended Case Method'. In: Burawoy, M., Burton, A., Gerguson, A. A. and Fox, K. J. (Eds), *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, University of California Press, Oxford, pp. 271-287.
- Burchell, B., Day, D., Hudson, M., Ladipo, D., Mankelow, R., Nolan, J., Reed, H., Wichert, I. and Wilkinson, F. (1999a) *Job insecurity and work intensification. Flexibility and the changing boundaries of work*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.
- Burchell, B., Deakin, S. and Honey, S. (1999b) *The Employment Status of Individuals in Non-standard Employment*, Employment Relations Research Series Number 6, Department of Trade and Industry's Employment Relations Directorate. Available from: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/inform.htm>, accessed 2000.

- Bytheway, B. (1997) 'Talking about age: the theoretical basis of social gerontology'. In: Jamieson, A., Harper, S. and Victor, C. (Eds), *Critical approaches to ageing and later life*, Open University Press, Buckingham, pp. 7-15.
- Cabinet Office (1998) *Unfair Discrimination in Employment in the Civil Service on the Basis of Age. Interim guidance*, Cabinet Office Development and Equal Opportunities Division, London.
- Cabinet Office (2000) *Winning the Generation Game*, The Stationery Office, Norwich.
- Campbell, N. (1999) *The Decline of Employment Among Older People in Britain*, London School of Economics, London.
- Cappelli, P. (1999) *The New Deal at Work: Managing the Market-Driven Workforce*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Cappelli, P., Bassi, L., Katz, H., Knoke, D., Osterman, P. and Useem, M. (1997) *Change at Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Casey, B. and Laczko, F. (1992) 'Older Worker Employment: Change and Continuity in the 1980s'. In: Gilbert, N., Burrows, R. and Pollert, A. (Eds), *Fordism and Flexibility. Divisions and Change*, MacMillan, Basingstoke, pp. 137-153.
- Casey, B., Metcalf, H. and Millward, N. (1997) *Employers' Use of Flexible Labour*, Policy Studies Institute, London.
- Castells, M. (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.
- Castells, M. (2000) 'Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society', *British Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1), pp. 5-24.
- Charmaz, K. (1995) 'Grounded theory'. In: Smith, J. A., Harre, R. and Langenhove, L. V. (Eds), *Rethinking methods in psychology*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 27-49.
- Charmaz, K. (2000) 'Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 509-535.
- Coffey, A. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*, Sage Publications, London.
- Cohen, L. and Mallon, M. (1999) 'The Transition from Organisational Employment to Portfolio Working: Perceptions of "Boundarylessness"', *Work, Employment & Society*, 13 (2), pp. 329-352.
- Coleman, J. S. (1994) *Foundations of Social Theory*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, London.

- Collier, A. (1994) *Critical Realism. An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, Verso, London.
- Collins English Dictionary (2000) (5th Edn), HarperCollins Publishers, Glasgow.
- Crofts, A. (1992) *How to Make Money from Freelance Writing*, Piatkus Books, London.
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, Sage Publications, London.
- Cully, M., Woodland, S., O'Reilly, A. and Dix, G. (1999) *Britain at Work*, Routledge, London.
- Davies, C. (2001) 'Portfolio Careers in the Public Sector: the case of the new professional regulators', *Work Employment & Society Conference: Winning and Losing in the New Economy*, University of Nottingham, September 11-13, 2001.
- Davis, H. and Scase, R. (2000) *Managing Creativity*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Debate of the Age (2000) *The Debate of the Age. Summary of Participation*, Age Concern England, London.
- DeFillippi, R. J. and Arthur, M. B. (1998) 'Paradox in Project-Based Enterprise. The Case of Film Making', *California Management Review*, 40 (2), pp. 125-139.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989) *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, (3rd Edn), Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Denzin, N. K. (1994) 'The Art and Politics of Interpretation'. In: Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 500-515.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2000) 'The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 1-28.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (1998) *Creative Industries Mapping Document*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, London.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2001) *Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, London.
- Department for Education and Employment (1998) *Advantage. Consultation on a Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment*, Department for Education and Employment Publications, Suffolk.
- Department for Education and Employment (1999) *Age Diversity in Employment. A Code of Practice*, DfEE Publications, Nottingham.

- Department of Trade and Industry (1998) *Converging Technologies: Consequences for the New Knowledge-Driven Economy*, Future Unit. Available from: www.dti.gov.uk/future-unit/complete/index.html, accessed 2000.
- Department of Trade and Industry (1999) *Work in the Knowledge-Driven Economy*, Future Unit. Available from: www.dti.gov.uk/future-unit/complete/index.html, accessed 2000.
- Dex, S. (1991) 'Life and work history analyses'. In: Dex, S. (Ed) *Life and Work History Analyses: Qualitative and Quantitative Developments*, Routledge, London, pp. 1-19.
- Dex, S. and McCulloch, A. (1997) *Flexible Employment. The Future of Britain's Jobs*, Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Dex, S., Willis, J., Paterson, R. and Sheppard, E. (2000) 'Freelance Workers and Contract Uncertainty: The effects of Contractual Changes in the Television Industry', *Work Employment & Society*, 14 (2), pp. 283-305.
- Dibden, J. and Hibbett, J. (1993) 'Older workers - an overview of recent research', *Employment Gazette*, June, pp. 237-250.
- Disney, R. (1998) *Crises in Public Pension Programmes in OECD: What are the reform options?*, University of Nottingham, Nottingham.
- Disney, R., Grundy, E. and Johnson, P. (Eds) (1997) *The Dynamics of Retirement: Analyses of the Retirement Surveys*, The Stationery Office, London.
- Disney, R., Meghir, C. and Whitehouse, E. (1994) 'Retirement behaviour in Britain', *Fiscal Studies*, 15 (1), pp. 24-43.
- Dobson, C. (1992) *The Freelance Journalist: How to Survive and Succeed*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Doeringer, P. B. (Ed) (1991) *Turbulence in the American Workplace*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Drucker, P. F. (1993) *Post-capitalist Society*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Drucker, P. F. (1999) *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York.
- Dyer, C. (2001) 'Ruling secures holidays for contract staff', *The Guardian*, June 27, p. 11.
- Ehrlich, D. (1999) 'Don't call us: you're far too experienced', *The Independent*, London, August 31.
- Ekinsmyth, C. (1999) 'Professional workers in a risk society', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24 (3), pp. 353-366.

- Employers Forum on Age (1996) *The business benefits of a mixed-age workforce. Case Studies*, Age Concern England, London.
- Employers Forum on Age (1997a) *Age, Employment and Business Success. Getting the balance right in recruitment*, Age Concern England, London.
- Employers Forum on Age (1997b) *Age, Employment and Business Success. Managing the size and balance of the workforce*, Employers Forum on Age, London.
- Employment Department Group (1994) *Getting On. The Benefits of an Older Workforce*, Employment Department, London.
- Estes, C. L., Linkins, K. W. and Binney, E. A. (1996) 'The Political Economy of Aging'. In: Binstock, R. H. and George, L. K. (Eds), *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, (4th Edn), Academic Press, London, pp. 346-361.
- Eurolink Age (2000) *Ageing in Employment: a proposal for a European Code of Good Practice*, Eurolink Age, London.
- Faulkner, R. R. and Anderson, A. B. (1987) 'Short-term Projects and Emergent Careers: Evidence from Hollywood', *American Journal of Sociology*, 92 (4), pp. 879-909.
- Felstead, A. and Jewson, N. (1999) 'Flexible Labour and Non-Standard Employment: An Agenda of Issues'. In: Felstead, A. and Jewson, N. (Eds), *Global Trends in Flexible Labour*, Macmillan Business, London, pp. 1-20.
- Felstead, A., Krahn, H. and Powell, M. (1999) 'Young and old at risk. Comparative trends in "non-standard" patterns of employment in Canada and the United Kingdom', *International Journal of Manpower*, 20 (5), pp. 277-296.
- Field, K. (1997) 'Redundancies in Great Britain', *Labour Market Trends*, April, pp. 135-142.
- Finch, J. and Mason, J. (1990) 'Decision-taking in the fieldwork process: theoretical sampling and collaborative working'. In: Burgess, R. G. (Ed) *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, JAI Press, London, pp. 25-50.
- Finch, J. and Mason, J. (2000) *Passing On: Kinship and Inheritance in England*, Routledge, London.
- Flick, U. (1998) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Foresight Ageing Population Panel (2000) *Labour, Leisure and Learning Taskforce: A consultation document*, Department of Trade and Industry, London.
- Gall, G. (1998) 'The changing relations of production; union derecognition in the UK magazine industry', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 29 (2), pp. 151-161.

- Gallie, D., White, M., Cheng, Y. and Tomlinson, M. (1998) *Restructuring the Employment Relationship*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Gallup (1990) *Ageism: the problem of the 1990s*, Brook Street Employment Bureau, London.
- Gergen, M. M. and Gergen, K. J. (2000) 'Qualitative Inquiry: Tensions and Transformations'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 1025-1046.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Gill, R. (2001) *New Media working practices*. Personal e-mail from author, dated July 12.
- Gill, R. and Dodd, D. (2000) *New Media. Working Practices in the Electronic Arts*. Available from: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/GENDER/new-media/partners.html>, accessed July 10 2001.
- Ginn, J. and Arber, S. (1995) 'Exploring Mid-Life Women's Employment', *Sociology*, 29 (1), pp. 73-94.
- Ginn, J. and Arber, S. (1996) 'Gender, Age and Attitudes to Retirement in Mid-Life', *Ageing and Society*, 16 (1), pp. 27-55.
- Girion, L. (2000) 'Older TV Writers Press Case', *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, California, November 12, pp. W1, W3.
- Gold, M. and Fraser, J. (2001) 'Managing Self-Management: Successful Transitions to Portfolio Careers', *Work Employment & Society Conference: Winning and Losing in the New Economy*, University of Nottingham, September 11-13, 2001.
- Gove, P. B. (Ed) (1961) *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, G. Bell & Sons, London.
- Graebner, W. (1980) *A History of Retirement. The Meaning and Function of An American Institution, 1885-1978*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Graham, A. and Davies, G. (1990) *Why Private Choice Needs Public Broadcasting*, Royal Television Society, London.
- Granger, B., Stanworth, J. and Stanworth, C. (1995) 'Self-employment Career Dynamics: The Case of 'Unemployment Push' in UK Book Publishing', *Work, Employment & Society*, 9 (3), pp. 499-516.
- Gray, M. (1987) *The Freelance Alternative*, Piatkus Books, London.
- Green, D. (1991) *A better BBC. Public Service Broadcasting in the '90s*, Centre for Policy Studies, London.

- Greenbury, L. (1994) *Jobs for the Over 50s. How to find work which values your experience*, Piatkus, London.
- Guest, D. (1998) 'Is the Psychological Contract Worth Taking Seriously?', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 19 (Special Issue), pp. 649-664.
- Guillemard, A.-M. (1997) 'Re-Writing Social Policy and Changes within the Life Course Organisation. A European Perspective', *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 16 (3), pp. 441-464.
- Hakim, C. (1987) *Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research*, Allen & Unwin, London.
- Hall, C. (1995) *How to Be a Freelance Journalist*, How to Books Ltd, Plymouth.
- Hall, D. T. and Mirvis, P. H. (1994) 'The New Workplace and Older Workers'. In: Auerbach, J. A. and Welsh, J. C. (Eds), *Aging and Competition: Rebuilding the U.S. Workforce*, National Planning Association, Washington DC.
- Hall, D. T. and Mirvis, P. H. (1995) 'The New Career Contract: Developing the Whole Person at Midlife and Beyond', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 47 (3), pp. 269-289.
- Hall, D. T. and Mirvis, P. H. (1999) 'Increasing the Value of Older Workers: Flexible Employment and Lifelong Learning'. In: Auerbach, J. A. (Ed) *Through a Glass Darkly: Building the New Workplace for the 21st Century*, National Policy Association, Washington DC.
- Handy, C. (1990) *Inside Organizations*, BBC Books, London.
- Handy, C. (1991) *The Age of Unreason*, (2nd Edn), Century Business, London.
- Handy, C. (1995) *The Empty Raincoat*, Arrow Business Books, London.
- Hann, M. (2001) 'Media studies? Do yourself a favour - forget it', *The Guardian Media section*, London, September 3, pp. 4-5.
- Henretta, J. C. (1994) 'Social Structure and Age-Based Careers'. In: Riley, M. W., Kahn, R. L. and Foner, A. (Eds), *Age and Structural Lag*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, pp. 57-79.
- Herriot, P., Hirsh, W. and Reilly, P. (1998) *Trust and Transition. Managing Today's Employment Relationship*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- Herriot, P., Manning, W. E. G. and Kidd, J. M. (1997) 'The Content of the Psychological Contract', *British Journal of Management*, 8 (2), pp. 151-162.
- Hickman, T. (1993) 'Over and Out? Is the BBC losing too many of the 50-plus age group?', *Equality is central, Central Directorates Equal Opportunities Newsletter*, April, pp. 2-3.
- Holloway, I. (1997) *Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research*, Blackwell Science, Oxford.

- Holmes, B. (1998) *Successfully Going Freelance in a Week*, (2nd Edn), Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Hooper, R. (1996) 'United Kingdom'. In: International Institute of Communications (Ed) *Media Ownership and Control in the age of convergence*, International Institute of Communications, London, pp. 229-246.
- Hopson, C. (1992) *Reforming The BBC*, European Policy Forum, London.
- House of Commons Employment Committee (1989) *The Employment Patterns of the Over-50s. Volume 1*, HMSO, London.
- Hughes, J. and Sharrock, W. (1997) *The Philosophy of Social Research*, (3rd Edn), Longman, London.
- Humphreys, P. J. (1996) *Mass media and media policy in Western Europe*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Hyde, V. (1928) *Freelance Journalism: A Practical Guide to Success*, George Allen & Unwin, London.
- Institute of Personnel Management (1991) *Age and Employment: an IPM statement*, Institute of Personnel Management, London.
- Irons, R. (1968) *Freelance*, Raymond Irons Publishing Co, London.
- Itzin, C. and Phillipson, C. (1993) *Age Barriers at Work. Maximising the potential of mature and older people*, Metropolitan Authorities Recruitment Agency, Solihull.
- Jacobs, K., Kohli, M. and Rein, M. (1991) 'The evolution of early exit: A comparative analysis of labor force participation patterns'. In: Kohli, M., Rein, M., Guillemard, A.-M. and van Gunsteren, H. (Eds), *Time for retirement. Comparative studies of early exit from the labor force*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 38-66.
- Janesick, V. J. (2000) 'The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 379-399.
- Jones, C. (1996) 'Careers in Project Networks: The Case of the Film Industry'. In: Arthur, M. B. and Rousseau, D. M. (Eds), *The Boundaryless Career. A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 58-75.
- Kantor, R. M. (1994) 'U.S. Competitiveness and the Aging Workforce: Toward Organizational and Institutional Change'. In: Auerbach, J. A. and Welsh, J. C. (Eds), *Aging and Competition: Rebuilding the U.S. Workforce*, National Planning Association, Washington DC, pp. 7-30.

- King, A. (1999) 'Against structure: a critique of morphogenetic social theory', *Sociological Review*, 47 (2), pp. 199-227.
- Knight, G. and McKay, S. (2000) 'Lifetime experiences of self-employment', *Labour Market Trends*, October, pp. 470-472.
- Kohli, M. (1988) 'Ageing as a Challenge for Sociological Theory', *Ageing and Society*, 8, pp. 367-394.
- Kohli, M. (1991) 'Retirement and the Moral Economy: An Historical Interpretation of the German Case'. In: Minkler, M. and Estes, C. L. (Eds), *Critical Perspectives on Aging. The Political and Moral Economy of Growing Old*, Baywood Publishing Company, New York, pp. 273-292.
- Kumar, K. (1995) *From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage Publications, London.
- Laczko, F. (1989) 'Between Work and Retirement: Becoming 'Old' in the 1980s'. In: Bytheway, B., Keil, T., Allatt, P. and Bryman, A. (Eds), *Becoming and Being Old: Sociological Approaches to Later Life*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 24-40.
- Laczko, F. and Phillipson, C. (1991) 'Great Britain: The contradictions of early exit'. In: Kohli, M., Rein, M., Guillemard, A.-M. and van Gunsteren, H. (Eds), *Time for retirement. Comparative studies of early exit from the labor force*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 222-251.
- Laurance, R. (1988) *Going Freelance: A Guide for Professionals*, John Wiley and Sons, New York.
- Layder, D. (1990) *The Realist Image in Social Science*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire.
- Layder, D. (1994) *Understanding Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London.
- Lee, R. M. and Fielding, N. G. (1991) 'Computing for Qualitative Research: Options, Problems and Potential'. In: Fielding, N. G. and Lee, R. M. (Eds), *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 1-13.
- Legge, K. (1998) 'Flexibility: the gift-wrapping of employment degradation'. In: Sparrow, P. and Marchington, M. (Eds), *Human Resource Management. The New Agenda*, Financial Times/Pitman, London, pp. 286-295.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (2000) 'Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 163-188.

- Local Government Management Board (1995) *Employment of Older Workers and Age Auditing*, Local Government Management Board, London.
- Lyon, D. (1988) *The Information Society: Issues and Illusions*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Lyon, P., Hallier, J. and Glover, I. (1998) 'Divestment or Investment? The Contradictions of Human Resource Management in Relation to Older Employees', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 8 (1), pp. 56-66.
- Mabey, C., Salaman, G. and Storey, J. (1998) 'Strategic Human Resource Management: The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory'. In: Mabey, C., Salaman, G. and Storey, J. (Eds), *Strategic Human Resource Management: A Reader*, Sage Publications, London.
- Maddox, B. and Collins, R. (1990) *New Media: Opportunity Knocks*, Kleinwort Benson Securities, London.
- Mallon, M. (1998a) 'From Public Sector Employees to Portfolio Workers: Pioneers of New Careers?'. In: Mabey, C., Skinner, D. and Clark, T. (Eds), *Experiencing Human Resource Management*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 169-186.
- Mallon, M. (1998b) 'The portfolio career: pushed or pulled to it?', *Personnel Review*, 27 (5), pp. 361-377.
- Malone, T. W. and Laubacher, R. J. (1998) 'The Dawn of the E-Lance Economy', *Harvard Business Review*, 76 (5), pp. 145-152.
- Marriott, S. and Jacobs, P. (1995) *Perfect Freelancing: All you need to get it right first time*, Arrow Business Books, London.
- Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative Researching*, Sage Publications, London.
- McGovern, P., Hope-Hailey, V. and Stiles, P. (1998) 'The Managerial Career after Downsizing: Case Studies from the 'Leading Edge'', *Work, Employment & Society*, 12 (3), pp. 457-477.
- McKay, S. and Middleton, S. (1998) *Characteristics of Older Workers*, HMSO, Norwich.
- McKinlay, A. and Quinn, B. (1999) 'Management, technology and work in commercial broadcasting, c. 1979-98', *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 14 (1), pp. 2-17.
- McLean Parks, J., Kidder, D. L. and Gallagher, D. G. (1998) 'Fitting square pegs into round holes: mapping the domain of contingent work arrangements onto the psychological contract', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 19 (Special Issue), pp. 697-730.
- Midwinter, E. (2000) *Towards a Balanced Society. A contextual commentary on the Debate of the Age*, Age Concern England, London.

- Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis. An Expanded Sourcebook*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London.
- Miles, R. and Snow, C. (1996) 'Twenty-First-Century Careers'. In: Arthur, M. and Rousseau, D. (Eds), *The Boundaryless Career. A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 97-115.
- Millward, L. J. and Brewerton, P. M. (1999) 'Contractors and their Psychological Contracts', *British Journal of Management*, 10, pp. 253-274.
- Millward, N., Bryson, A. and Forth, J. (2000) *All Change at Work?*, Routledge, London.
- Mintzberg, H. (1994) *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, Prentice Hall, London.
- Moody, H. R. (1993) 'Overview: What Is Critical Gerontology and Why is it Important?'. In: Cole, T., Achenbaum, W. A., Jakobi, P. and Kastenbaum, R. (Eds), *Voices and Visions of Aging: Towards a Critical Gerontology*, Springer Publishing Company, New York, pp. xv-xli.
- Moralee, L. (1998) 'Self-employment in the 1990s', *Labour Market Trends*, March, pp. 121-130.
- Morgan, G. (1997) *Images of Organization*, Sage Publications, London.
- Morgan, L. and Kunkel, S. (1998) *Aging. The Social Context*, Pine Forge Press, London.
- Morris, R. (1995) *Working for Yourself: How to Succeed at Being Your Own Boss*, Piatkus Books, London.
- Moser, P. K. (1999) 'Realism, Objectivity, and Skepticism'. In: Greco, J. and Sosa, E. (Eds), *The Blackwell Guide for Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, pp. 70-91.
- Mulholland, K. (1998) 'Survivors' Versus 'Movers and Shakers': The Reconstitution of Management and Careers in the Privatised Utilities'. In: Thompson, P. and Warhurst, C. (Eds), *Workplaces of the Future*, Macmillan Business, London, pp. 184-203.
- Mythen, G. (2001) 'Employment, Individualization and Insecurity: Rethinking Ulrich Beck's 'Risk Regime'', *Work Employment & Society Conference: Winning and Losing in the New Economy*, University of Nottingham, September 11-13, 2001.
- Neustatter, A. (1999) 'Pushing against the clock', *Press Gazette*, June 11, p. 18.
- New Media Knowledge (1999) *Interactive London 1999. Mapping the Capital's New Media Industry*, New Media Knowledge, London.
- Noyelle, T. J. (1987) *Beyond Industrial Dualism: Market and Job Segmentation in the New Economy*, Westview Press, London.
- Ochberg, R. L. (1996) 'Interpreting Life Stories'. In: Josselson, R. (Ed) *Ethics and Process in The Narrative Study of Lives*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 97-113.

- OECD (1995a) *The Labour Market and Older Workers*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.
- OECD (1995b) *The Transition from Work to Retirement*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (1998) *Maintaining Prosperity in an Ageing Society*, OECD, Paris.
- Office for National Statistics (1999) *Social Focus on Older People*, The Stationery Office, London.
- Oliver, M. (1993) 'BBC Spending: Adapting to a New World Order'. In: Barnett, S. (Ed) *Funding the BBC's Future*, British Film Institute, London, pp. 108-121.
- Outhwaite, W. (1987) *New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory*, Macmillan, London.
- Pahl, R. (1995) *After Success: Fin-de-Siecle, Anxiety and Identity*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Pahl, R. E. (1988) 'Epilogue: On Work'. In: Pahl, R. E. (Ed) *On Work: Historical, Comparative and Theoretical Approaches*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 743-752.
- Palmer, R. (1993) *1000 Markets for Freelance Writers: an A-Z guide to general and specialist magazines and journals*, Piatkus, London.
- Parker, J. (2000) *Structuration*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Paterson, R. (1999) 'Work Histories in Television', *Seventeenth Annual International Labour Process Conference*, Royal Holloway, University of London, March 29-30, 1999.
- Paterson, R. (2001) 'Work histories in television', *Media, Culture & Society*, 23 (4), pp. 495-520.
- Patton, M. Q. (1987) *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, Sage Publications, London.
- Peters, M., Cressy, R. and Storey, D. (1999) *The Economic Impact of Ageing on Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, Warwick Business School, Warwick University.
- Platman, K. (1995) *Getting on in the BBC: A case study of older workers*, King's College, London University, London. MSc dissertation.
- Platman, K. (1999) *The Glass Precipice. Employability for a Mixed Age Workforce*, Employers Forum on Age, London.
- Platman, K. and Tinker, A. (1998) 'Getting on in the BBC: a case study of older workers', *Ageing and Society*, 18 (5), pp. 513-535.
- Pollert, A. (1991) 'The Orthodoxy of Flexibility'. In: Pollert, A. (Ed) *Farewell to Flexibility?*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 3-31.
- Pool, K. (2000) 'Love, Not Money', *The Author*, pp. 58-66.
- Purcell, H. (1990) 'Why TV is just not cricket for the over-40s', *Ariel*, p. 9.

- Quadagno, J., Hardy, M. and Hazelrigg, L. (1996) 'Downsizing and the Erosion of the Fordist Life Cycle: Older Workers in the Automobile Manufacturing and Banking Industries', *International Group on Aging at Work: Firms, Employment Strategies and Public Policy Conference*, Paris, June 28-29, 1996.
- Quinn, J. B. (1992) *Intelligent Enterprise: A Knowledge and Service Based Paradigm for Industry*, The Free Press, New York.
- Rainbird, H. (1991) 'The Self-Employed: Small Entrepreneurs or Disguised Wage Labourers?'. In Pollert, A. (Ed) *Farewell to Flexibility?*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 200-214.
- Reich, R. B. (1991) *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, Simon & Schuster, London.
- Richardson, L. (2000) 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 923-948.
- Riley, M. W., Foner, A. and Riley, J. W., Jr (1999) 'The Aging and Society Paradigm'. In: Bengtson, V. L. and Schaie, K. W. (Eds), *Handbook of Theories of Aging*, Springer Publishing Company, New York, pp. 327-343.
- Riley, M. W., Kahn, R. L. and Foner, A. (1994) *Age and Structural Lag. Society's Failure to Provide Meaningful Opportunities in Work, Family and Leisure*, John Wiley & Sons, New York.
- Roberts, I. (2001) 'Survival and Sustainability? Collective and Individual Aspects of the Social Reproduction of Labour', *Work, Employment and Society Conference: Winning and Losing in the New Economy*, University of Nottingham, September 11-13, 2001.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing political thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Saundry, R. (1998) 'The Limits of Flexibility: the Case of UK Television', *British Journal of Management*, 9, pp. 151-162.
- Saundry, R. and Nolan, P. (1998) 'Regulatory change and performance in TV production', *Media, Culture & Society*, 20, pp. 409-426.
- Sayer, A. (1992) *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, (2nd Edn), Routledge, London.
- Sayer, A. (2000) *Realism and Social Science*, Sage Publications, London.
- Scales, J. and Scase, R. (2000) *Fit and Fifty? A Report Prepared for the Economic and Social Research Council*, Economic and Social Research Council, Swindon.

- Schuller, T. (1989) 'Work-Ending: Employment and Ambiguity in Later Life'. In: Bytheway, B., Keil, T., Allatt, P. and Bryman, A. (Eds), *Becoming and Being Old: Sociological Approaches to Later Life*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 41-54.
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, W.W. Norton & Co, London.
- Seymour-Ure, C. (1996) *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, (2nd Edn), Basic Blackwell, Oxford.
- Sharp, J. A. and Howard, K. (1996) *The Management of a Student Research Project*, (2nd Edn), Gower Publishing with the Open University, Aldershot, Hants.
- Shaw, C. (2000) '1998-based national population projections for the United Kingdom and constituent countries', *Population Trends*, Spring, pp. 4-12.
- Shayne, B. (2001) 'No Experience Wanted', *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, California, June 10, pp. 8-9, 88-89.
- Simpson, J. A. and Weiner, E. S. C. (Eds) (1989) *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Skillset (2000) *A Snapshot in Time. Employment Census 2000*, Skillset, London.
- Sly, F. and Stillwell, D. (1997) 'Temporary workers in Great Britain', *Labour Market Trends*, September, pp. 347-354.
- Sparrow, P. and Cooper, C. L. (1998) 'New Organizational Forms: The Strategic Relevance of Future Psychological Contract Scenarios', *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 15 (4), pp. 356-371.
- Spence, M. (1999) 'Labouring in a Sexy Industry', *Seventeenth International Labour Process Conference*, Royal Holloway, University of London, March 29-30, 1999.
- Stake, R. (2000) 'Case Studies'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 435-454.
- Stanworth, C. and Stanworth, J. (1995) 'The self-employed without employees - autonomous or atypical?', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 26 (3), pp. 221-229.
- Sterns, H. L. and Miklos, S. M. (1995) 'The Aging Worker in a Changing Environment: Organizational and Individual Issues', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 47, pp. 248-268.
- Stokes, J. and Reading, A. (1999) *The Media in Britain*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire.
- Stonham, P. (1995) 'Work and Organisations: A Profile of Charles Handy, Writer and Educator', *European Management Journal*, 13 (4), pp. 374-381.

- Storey, J. and Sisson, K. (1990) 'Limits to transformation: human resource management in the British context', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 21 (1), pp. 60-65.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1994) 'Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 273-285.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Sage Publications, London.
- Taylor, M. (1997) *The Changing Picture of Self-Employment in Britain*, ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change, Colchester, University of Essex.
- Taylor, P. and Urwin, P. (1999) 'Recent Trends in the Labour Force Participation of Older People in the UK', *The Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance*, 24 (4), pp. 551-579.
- Taylor, P. and Walker, A. (1994) 'The ageing workforce: employers attitudes towards older people', *Work, Employment and Society*, 8 (4), pp. 569-591.
- Taylor, P. and Walker, A. (1997) 'Age discrimination and public policy', *Personnel Review*, 26 (4), pp. 307-318.
- Taylor, P. and Walker, A. (1998) 'Employers and older workers: attitudes and employment practices', *Ageing and Society*, 18, pp. 641-658.
- The News Corporation Ltd (2001) *Website*. Available from:
<http://www.newscorp.com/investor/body.html>, accessed October 24 2001.
- Thompson, M. (1991) *Last in the Queue? Corporate Employment Policies and the Older Worker*, Institute of Manpower Studies, Sussex.
- Townsend, P. (1981) 'The Structured Dependency of the Elderly: A Creation of Social Policy in the Twentieth Century', *Ageing and Society*, 1 (1), pp. 5-28.
- Trinder, C., Hulme, G. and McCarthy, U. (1992) *Employment: The Role of Work in the Third Age*, Public Finance Foundation, London.
- Turner, B. A. (1983) 'The Use of Grounded Theory for the Qualitative Analysis of Organizational Behaviour', *Journal of Management Studies*, 20 (3), pp. 333-348.
- Turner, B. A. (1988) 'Connoisseurship in the Study of Organizational Cultures'. In: Bryman, A. (Ed) *Doing Research in Organizations*, Routledge, London, pp. 108-122.
- Turner, J. H. and Collins, R. (1989) 'Toward a Microtheory of Structuring'. In: Turner, J. H. (Ed) *Theory Building in Sociology. Assessing Theoretical Cumulation*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 118-130.

- Ursell, G. (1998) 'Labour flexibility in the UK commercial television sector', *Media, Culture & Society*, 20 (1), pp. 129-153.
- Ursell, G. (2000) 'Television production: issues of exploitation, commodification and subjectivity in UK television labour markets', *Media, Culture & Society*, 22 (6), pp. 805-825.
- Useem, M. (1999) 'Business Restructuring and the Aging Workforce'. In: Auerbach, J. A. (Ed) *Through a Glass Darkly: Building the New Workplace for the 21st Century*, National Policy Association, Washington DC, pp. 27-35.
- Varlaam, A. (1998) *Freelance Employment & Training Needs: A follow-up survey*, Skillset, London.
- Vincent, J. A. (1995) *Inequality and Old Age*, UCL Press, London.
- Vogt, W. P. (1999) *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London.
- Walker, A. (1980) 'The Social Creation of Poverty and Dependency in Old Age', *Journal of Social Policy*, 9 (1), pp. 49-75.
- Walker, A. and Maltby, T. (1997) *Ageing Europe*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Walker, A. and Taylor, P. (1993) 'Ageism versus productive ageing: the challenge of age discrimination in the labour market'. In: Bass, S., Caro, F. G. and Chen, Y. P. (Eds), *Achieving a Productive Ageing Society*, Auburn House, London.
- Walker, A. and Taylor, P. (Eds) (1998) *Combating Age Barriers in Employment: A European Portfolio of Good Practice*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Loughlinstown, County Dublin.
- Warr, P. and Pennington, J. (1993) 'Views about Age Discrimination and Older Workers'. In: Institute of Personnel Management (Ed) *Age and Employment. Policies, attitudes and practice*, Institute of Personnel Management, London, pp. 75-106.
- Watson, G. (1994a) 'The flexible workforce and patterns of working hours in the UK', *Employment Gazette*, July, pp. 239-247.
- Watson, T. J. (1994b) 'Managing, Crafting and Researching: Words, Skill and Imagination in Shaping Management Research', *British Journal of Management*, 5 (Special Issue), pp. S77-S87.
- Webster, F. (1995) *Theories of The Information Society*, Routledge, London.
- Weiss, P. R. and Faulkner, R. R. (1983) 'Credits and Craft Production: Freelance Social Organization in the Hollywood Film Industry, 1964-1978', *Symbolic Interaction*, 6 (1), pp. 111-123.

- Weitzman, E. and Miles, M. (1995) *Computer Programs for Qualitative Data Analysis. A Software Sourcebook*, Sage Publications, London.
- Weitzman, E. A. (2000) 'Software and Qualitative Research'. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd Edn), Sage Publications, London, pp. 803-820.
- Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*, Sage Publications, London.
- Westergaard, J., Noble, I. and Walker, A. (1989) *After Redundancy. The Experience of Economic Insecurity*, Polity Press, Oxford.
- Weymouth, A. (1996) 'The media in Britain'. In: Weymouth, T. and Lamizet, B. (Eds), *Markets & Myths: Forces for Change in the European Media*, Longman, London, pp. 37-75.
- White, M. (1996) 'The labour market and risk'. In: Meadows, P. (Ed) *Work out - or work in? Contributions to the debate on the future of work*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, pp. 59-86.
- Willis, J. and Dex, S. (1999) *Mothers returning to TV production work: Equal Opportunities in a Flexible Labour Market*, The Judge Institute for Management Studies, Cambridge University, Cambridge.
- Wilson, R. (2000) *The rise in unemployment among older people: causes and solutions*, Institute of Directors, London.
- Woolf, M. and Holly, S. (1994) *Employment Patterns and Training Needs 1993/4. Freelance & Set Crafts Research*, Skillset, London.
- Worsley, R. (1996) *Age and Employment. Why employers should think again about older workers*, Age Concern England, London.
- Yin, R. K. (1984) *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*, Sage Publications, London.
- Young, M. and Schuller, T. (1991) *Life After Work. The Arrival of the Ageless Society*, HarperCollins, London.